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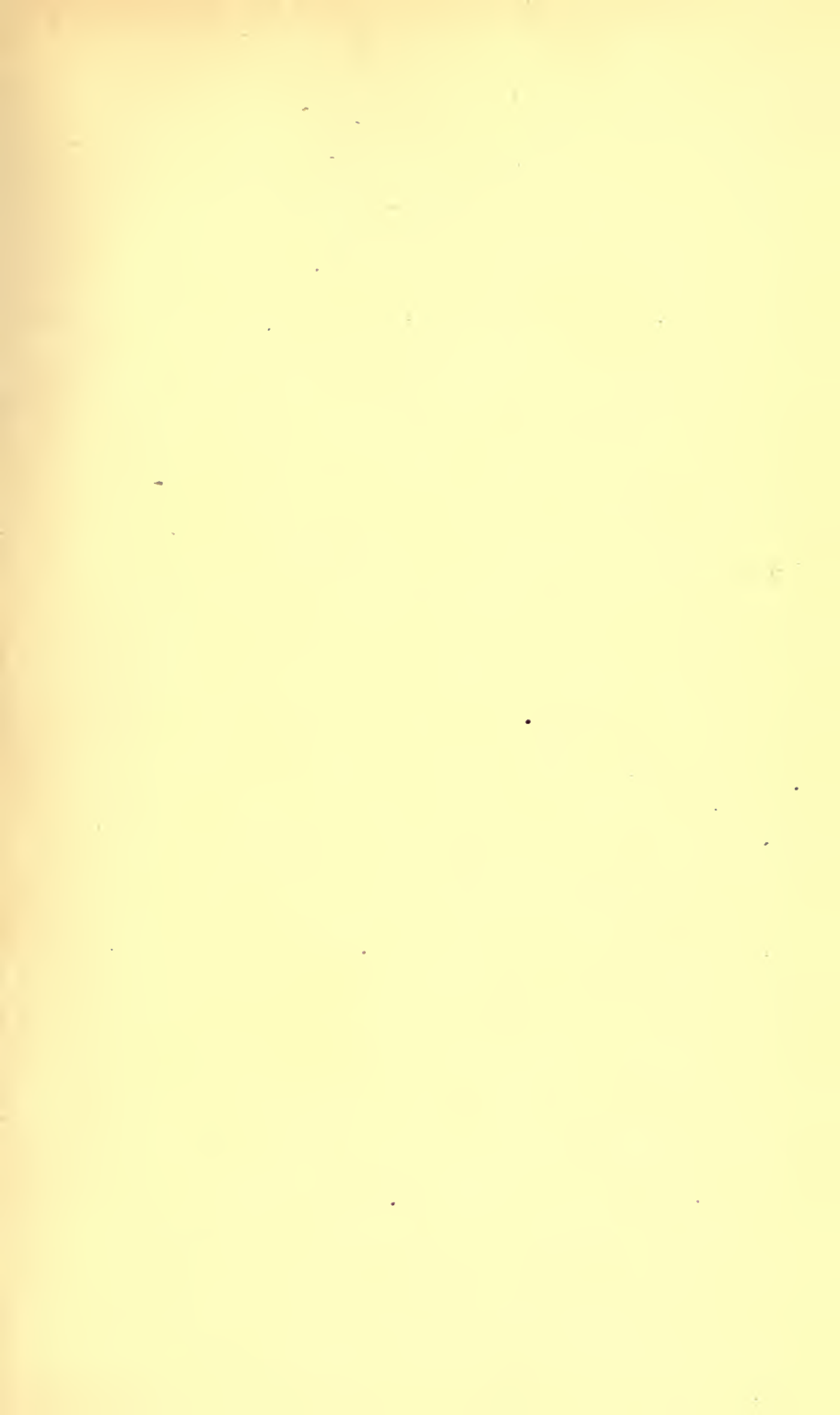
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LOVE'S LEGEND

LOVE'S LEGEND

BY

H. FIELDING-HALL

AUTHOR OF

'THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE,' ETC.

Legend is truth incarnated in story

NEW YORK
HENRY HOLT AND COMPANY

1914

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P R E F A C E

TO THE READER

THE pleasure-seeker on a summer sea notes but the surface, the curve and toss of wavelets that pass by, the colour and the light, the sparkle of the sun upon the foam ; it is enough for him, it gives him pleasure, which is all he seeks and needs. But here and there is one who seeks for more than this. He rises above the *frivole* of the individual spray, and, looking down, he sees things that the surface traveller dreams not of. Beneath the ripple and the fret he notes signs of the ocean currents, those that keep the seas alive and fresh, that pass from pole to pole for ever round the world. He sees dim shadows of great things hid in the deep abyss, things that can never be defined, because it is of their essence that they

lie beneath all definitions ; he has faint glimpses of the hidden bases of the world.

I know not which seeker of the two you be. Whichever you may be, you are in your right to take that only which you want, and to you God-speed !

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CHAPTER I

‘The same stream of life that runs through my veins
night and day runs through the world and dances in
rhythmic measures.

‘It is the same life that shoots in joy through the
dust of the earth in numberless blades of grass and breaks
into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.

‘It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle
of birth and death in ebb and in flow.

‘I feel my limbs are made glorious by the touch of
this world of life. And my pride is from the life-throb
of ages dancing in my blood at this moment.’

RABINDRANATH TAGORE.



T was still quite dark as we rode up the winding jungle path that ended at the cliff. There was not room for us side by side, therefore I rode in front and Lesbia followed. We went in silence, partly because divided thus it was difficult to talk, partly because Lesbia was in a rage. It was not a heated temper that possessed her, but a frozen indignation that radiated silence as an iceberg does a chill, that pushed me from her as the negative pole of a battery would do. The ponies scrambled bravely up, and at last we reached the summit.

‘Here we dismount,’ I said.

Lesbia did not answer. She let me help her from the saddle and stood in dignified aloofness while I fastened the ponies’ bridles to a tree. Then I stepped into the jungle. ‘Come!’ I said. The bushes and creepers were thick and I had to push them aside and break them to make a way. I could see nothing, of course, except the bushes in front and all round me, but I knew that Lesbia was

following—I heard her footsteps, the rustle of her skirts, and an occasional smothered exclamation when a too elastic branch sprang back and struck her.

At last I forced my way out on to the flat rock, and Lesbia joined me.

‘Look!’ I said. ‘But you had better hold my arm or you may be giddy.’

She put her hand upon my arm as she might upon an indifferent railing, and looked.

In front of us was a great vacancy, the wide, deep valley of the river, and within this valley night still lingered, not as a darkness but as a clear blue gloom through which the farther slopes were faintly visible.

Faint wreaths of mist were drawn along the water meadows, and the air was still.

‘And now let us look over. I will hold this tree with one hand and hold you with the other. Look right down!’

Her clasp upon me tightened, and we went together to the edge. Then we looked down.

At first it seemed almost infinity that we gazed into, so broad, so deep the valley lay beneath. Then far below we could distinguish things, forest-clad banks and rocks, and a great river, smooth and grey as steel, that bent about the bluff on which we stood and disappeared. No sound came from the abyss. The great strong river moved quite silently; the birds were not awake yet, and the forest life was still.

‘Oh!’ said Lesbia, with a sigh, ‘draw me back.’ I drew her landward.

‘Now look up!’ I said.

Beyond the valley was a mountain range that stretched into infinity, and behind its peaks the dawn was come. There was a radiance glowing there, and all along the crests a line of fire. First it was pink, then crimson; then it turned to gold, to molten gold that glowed and trembled as it grew. It seemed as if beyond those hills there was a fountain of pure light that leapt within its chalice. It welled from the hidden sources rising above the brim, and then at length, suddenly, like a great flood, it overflowed. As we watched, the sun rose up, and like the wine of life his light poured into the great valley. Then it was filled. The blue gloom of the night was gone, the forest green was almost luminous, the river gleamed like gold.

All the world laughed with joy and gladness that the day was come again. Down in the river fishes leapt, and in the copses birds burst into song. I felt Lesbia tremble in my grasp, and drew her closer. Her pulses quickened, and I saw upon her cheeks a flush caught from the dawn.

‘Well,’ I asked, with a laugh, ‘and am I justified?’

She turned on me reproachfully eyes like the stars. A strand of hair tinted with sunlight glory brushed my face.

‘You should have told me,’ she complained.

‘I did.’

‘You only said it was worth seeing. How should I know it was like this?’

‘How could I tell you that it was like this? Are there words for that?’ I waved my hand towards the sunrise.

For it was not alone the colours spread upon the hills and sky, not only the living light that throbbed and palpitated when dawn was come; it was that in all this splendour there was hidden an emotion and a purpose. It seemed as if in all this life there lay an exultation as of a thought accomplished, a victory won, a dream made real. Some one had thought out all this beauty and had bent all nature to His purpose. Within this radiance laughed the soul of all the world. Dead nature? Had nature not a soul it had been dead, its energies all dissipated long ago. Indeed it had never lived.

People who have lived much with nature always see this and feel it. All early peoples saw it and expressed it in a hundred ways. When you are face to face with nature without any sign of man you cannot help but see it—that in man alone is not all the intelligence or emotion of the world. And once you have seen it you can always see it anywhere. But people born in old countries seem to have lost the sense of nature. They cannot see beneath

the trivialities of man's work which overlies it. In old temples, palaces, and castles they will see and feel the design and the desire of those that made them, but mountains and trees and rivers are to them dead things. The sense of God is gone. He is to them far, far away, in some dream-heaven and not on earth. Churches have banished Him, and put themselves in His place. And they are afraid of Him—afraid! Therefore it was that I made Lesbia come here.

‘Now do you understand?’ I asked.

‘Yes,’ she said at last, ‘it makes one understand.’

‘So that I would not have you miss it,’ I replied. ‘Yet,’ and I laughed, ‘you gave me a great deal of trouble. You argued. You said you had often seen a sunrise before. Have you?’

‘No,’ she admitted, ‘many dawns, perhaps, never a sunrise.’

‘You didn't want to get up so early.’

‘It was so dark and cold!’

‘What trouble I had!’ I repeated, and placed my hand upon her shoulder. ‘I argued—it was no use. I begged—no use. At last I threatened!’

‘How dared you?’ she said indignantly. ‘You said you would come and pull me out of bed. How dared you? We are not married yet, monsieur.’

‘No,’ I answered, unabashed, ‘had we

been married I would not have threatened at all. I would have acted !'

She turned and regarded me severely in the face.

'Do you know what I was thinking all the way as we rode up ?'

'Certainly,' I answered.

'Oh !' she replied, as one suddenly disarmed of a secret weapon. 'What was it ?'

'You were thinking whether you had not made a mistake, whether you had not better break it off. It seemed a pity after you had taken the trouble and expense to come all this long way to marry me, but better a mistake before than after.'

'How still more horrid of you to have guessed !' she said. 'How did you do it ?'

'Well,' I replied, 'you have a tell-tale face and eyes. But it wasn't they that told me, because it was too dark to see. It was the atmosphere.'

'The atmosphere ?'

'Your atmosphere. You radiated cold like an iceberg does. You were as cheerful as a stalactite, as——'

'I won't be called names,' and she stamped her foot. 'Iceberg and stalactite indeed ! I wonder what you were— A—a—' searching for a word with visible annoyance that she had not one ready.

'I was all that,' I admitted, to save her the trouble.

'You were just determined and horrid,' she continued. 'Monsieur, I warn you, you had better be very careful till this day week, or this day week may never come.'

'Well,' I returned, 'you must settle that with the almanack. For myself, even in an official capacity, I never dared to interfere with either the almanack or the weather. There are limits even to the authority of government. Besides I *am* careful. I am very careful. If I had not brought you up here, I should never have forgiven myself.'

'What about my forgiveness?' she asked.

'True,' I said. 'I am glad you reminded me. There,' taking her face in my hands and kissing her on both cheeks, 'I forgive you, Lesbia.'

'Oh,' she said indignantly, when she had recovered, 'I didn't mean that at all. *You* forgive *me*, indeed! I meant, "what about my forgiving you?" That's the important part.'

'So it is,' I admitted. 'Well, I am quite ready,' holding my face to hers. 'Now, forgive me!'

'Do you *want* to be forgiven?' she asked demurely.

'I do,' I said.

'Then say, "Please forgive me, Lesbia."'

'Please forgive me, Lesbia, dear,' I repeated.

'I won't ever do it again,' she dictated.

'I won't ever do it again—till next time.'

'You don't say it quite right,' she com-

plained. 'But there,' forgiving me on one cheek, 'and there,' forgiving me on the other, 'now it's all forgiven and forgotten.'

'That's the *amende honorable* on both sides,' I answered. 'Now let's turn again to watch the sunrise.'

We were at the very head of the thousand-mile valley, down which the river flows into the sea. Before us stretched a wilderness of mountains rising into peaks in the far distance. To the east was China, to the north the hills that rise and rise up to the roof of the world.

It is from this watershed of mighty rivers that the male stream comes. No man has ever yet seen its birthplace up amid those eternal snows. Born of the glaciers on the slopes of that unknown land, it is a boisterous and a headstrong river, falling down precipices with a loud roar and laughter, bursting through mountain barriers that it cuts into deep gorges, buried sometimes in forests where no axe has ever sounded, resting a while in levels, only to hurry forward once again, until at length, its youth and play-time past, it breaks through one last deep defile and comes out into the great valley where its course must run. There it joins another stream, a slower and more placid water born of a lower level, flowing with slower, sweeter rhythm. The junction was just before us as we looked. We saw the hurrying, tumbling, snow-fed torrent and the rain-born stream join in one channel, to march

together to the sea. They joined, yet did not merge. Side by side they lay within one bed, yet for a time they were distinct. He hurried still ; his whirls and eddies had not ceased. Her measure had hardly quickened yet out of her placidness. He pulled ; she clung to bank and rock, afraid of his haste.

‘ Why, look ! ’ said Lesbia, pointing down at the two streams ; ‘ it ’s you and me. Look how you burst from out your gorge with noise and foam and haste, just like a man. Look at poor me, how quiet and happy while I was alone, flowing between the meadows, now disturbed by all your turbulence. ’

‘ Yes, look at you ; slow and hard to move, clinging to your bed. ’

‘ Look how clear my waters are, ’ said Lesbia : ‘ while look at yours, all dark and muddy. ’

‘ But in my sands are gold. ’

‘ And in my waters, fish. ’

‘ Your fish are but small. It is not till we have joined that there are big fish in our waters. ’
I laughed.

‘ Look down the valley, the waters merge. Look at that cape. Beyond that is the station where I live, the last outpost of civilisation. You remember that there the waters are quite blended, and there the river’s life begins ; so it remains until it reaches the sea, one river always, till the sea takes it. ’

‘ And then ? ’ she asked, looking at me wistfully. ‘ And then ? ’

‘And then?’ I answered. ‘All rivers flow into the sea, yet is not the sea filled; to the place whence the rivers come they all return again.’

She sighed.

‘But it is a long way to the sea yet,’ I said. ‘The river has its work to do before it ceases—and begins again.’

‘Its work. Does the river work?’

‘Naturally. Has it not lands to water as it goes—islands and water meadows? Must not it carry silt to fertilise its shores? Has it not wheels to turn? Has it not steamers and boats and rafts to bear? Isn't that work?’

‘Oh!’ she said.

‘Lesbia,’ said I, ‘I know this river from its beginning here a thousand miles unto the sea. I know its every curve and bend and cape and island. I know its villages and its villagers. I have lived, here and there, up and down this river, for many years. I have seen its water dyed with blood, lit up by fires, and silver still beneath the moon. I know it in all its moods, therefore it is a friend of mine.’

‘A friend! a river?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘Again I will not try to explain, because I could not. Will you let us take our honeymoon upon this river before we sail for home? Then I will introduce you to my friend and you will understand. You won't regret it.’

‘Would you like it?’

‘Yes,’ I said. ‘But it is for you to choose. If you don’t want, I will not press you.’

‘I do not care for steamers,’ she replied.

‘Not on a steamer. Do you think a river would let a noisy, fussy, self-willed thing like a steamer into its intimacy?’

‘How then?’

‘That is my secret.’

‘More secrets?’

‘Yes, a week more of secrets.’

‘And after that?’

‘No one can keep a secret from his other self,’ I answered.

She smiled.

‘I have fought upon this river. I have worked upon it, and beside it. I have gone to it in happiness and it has laughed with me; I have sought it when in trouble and it has never failed me. It talks to me. I have learned many things from it; it never kept a secret from me. Now I want that it should share something with me in return.’

‘What?’

‘You, Lesbia, the best thing I have got. It is the one return that I can make worthy of the river.’

She smiled a faint glad smile and looked down at the water.

‘How long?’ she asked at length.

‘A month, a moon.’

‘Won’t we get tired of it by then?’

I shook my head.

'Mayn't we get tired of each other all alone together, so solitary?'

'Lesbia,' I said, 'when you have found a book, a book full of heart secrets, do you care to first open it in public? Do not you take it to some quiet place where no one comes, to read and think and read again. You are such a book to me. I want a quiet place to read you in.'

She smiled again that little enigmatic smile tinged with a blush, and answered—

'But I—I? What am I to do? Be read, and that is all?'

'You must read me, and read yourself, your real self. There are so many things I want you to read—and understand. You must, you *must*.'

'Whether I will or no?'

'Whether you will or no. But you must will. That is part of the undertaking, to be read and read.'

'Oh!' she said; 'is that so? I did not know.'

'Yes, it is so. Love lies in telling secrets. Didn't you know?'

She shook her head. 'I have no secrets.'

'Oh yes; you have secrets innumerable. You may not know them, but they are there, for me to waken, for us both to read.'

She shook her head.

'I have no secrets.'

'Lesbia,' I said, 'look up!' I took her face between my hands and held it. 'Lesbia, I look into your eyes. They are as deep as

any sea, profound as is the heaven. I see there shadows passing to and fro, dim, faint, unrealised imaginings of things to come. You may not know, but they are there. Those are your secrets.'

'I do not know them.'

'No. But I will read them, for myself and you, and from imaginings they will become realities.'

She only stared into the sunrise.

'And there is no place like the river. Lesbia, will you come?'

'I must,' she said. 'I suppose you brought me here for that?'

'That amongst other things.'

'Then it is settled. Shall we now go back?'

'Not yet,' I said. 'There is something more to see. Look over once again.'

She looked and gave a gasp of astonishment. For all the gorge beneath was white, was full of fleecy mists. They hid the river and the forest like a rising sea. The sun gleamed on them, but could not pierce them.

'Where did they come from?' she demanded.

'From nowhere. The first sunbeams draw them from out the ground. Look, they are rising!'

Slowly they rose, a great white sea that flowed in billowed clouds between the mountains. They surged up to the rock on which

we stood, flowed about our feet and then engulfed us. All the view had gone. We two stood in completest solitude upon our rock. We could not even see each other's faces clearly, so thick the mist was round us. Up above, the sun was paled into a wan white globe amid the drifting wreaths.

'What a change!' she said.

'Yes, a short while ago the sun was strong, filling the world with light and heat. Now look at it. What does it remind-you of?'

She shook her head.

'I saw the pallid corpse
Of the dead sun
Borne through the northern sky :
Blasts from Niffelheim
Lifted the sheeted mists
About him as he passed.'—

I quoted.

She nodded. 'Yes, the "sheeted mists." They are just like that.'

The mist swirled past us in long wreaths and coils and eddies, drawn upward by the heat. Slowly the valley beneath cleared again. Through the thinning mists we saw the forest reappear, and then the river. At last the mists rose above and left the world below clear. The sun, having got them up into his sky, very quickly ate them up, and all the world was bright once more.


Then we remounted our ponies and rode back.

CHAPTER II

‘True marriage lieth not in form nor ceremony, in
charms recited by priests nor bonds framed by lawyers,
but like the Kingdom of Heaven it is within you.’

GANGLER.

II

T is more than four hours now since we were married, and yet I cannot bring myself to realise what has happened, that when the guests say Mrs. Gallio they mean me, and that I must answer ; that I no longer am myself, an entity apart, but a half with some one else. Moreover, the other half isn't here.

We were married at nine o'clock, and at ten there was the wedding breakfast. At eleven I retired to change and rest, and now at two o'clock I am waiting in the verandah for my—for him. He went off to make the final arrangements on the—whatever it is, that is to take us on our honeymoon. That is another thing that troubles me. Every one else in the station, no doubt, knows what this conveyance is ; I alone don't know—yet it is for me. And they are not content with knowing and keeping silent ; they must hide their knowledge under a pretence of curiosity and ignorance that is simply exasperating. Only

men would do such a thing. Men never really seem to grow up in some things. They are always children. They are talking now behind my back. For all the station are in the verandah also, two women and seven men. The two women are sitting in chairs at the end, but the men seem mostly to have followed me here, where I came to look out for him. I can hear them talking, and if possible I take no notice, but sometimes they address themselves directly to me, and I have to answer. That is young Lieutenant Dicker now.

‘He’s late, Mrs. Gallio. Perhaps he is not comin’ back at all, forgotten all about it. He’s an absent-minded beggar, your husband. Left me out shootin’ once just like this. Quite forgot all about me, but he did not forget to take the lunch coolie with him.’

‘Shall I go and fetch him, Mrs. Gallio?’ asks Major Burns eagerly.

‘Oh, do be quiet,’ I say. ‘He is not late. There’s lots of time.’

‘There are all sorts of stories,’ that young Dicker goes on, ‘about the thing he has fitted up for you to go down the river in. Won’t you tell us about it?’

‘No,’ I say, ‘I *won’t*.’

‘I did hear,’ says another voice, Mr. Roberts’s I think, ‘that Gallio had bought a flotilla steamer, taken out the engines and

boilers, and had it painted white and gold and furnished from Maple.'

Silence from me.

'I don't believe that,' says Major Burns. 'I have heard a much more likely story. Ballantyne told me a few days ago that, as he came up on his mail steamer, he saw a queer thing in the river just in front of him; he kept his eye on it, but when he came near, it disappeared. He says if it hadn't been a thousand miles from the sea, he could have sworn it was a submarine.'

'What a lovely idea,' says Dicker.

'Nonsense!' says Mr. Bruce, 'no one would go for a honeymoon on a submarine.'

'Why not?'

'No view.' This from Roberts.

'People don't care about views on honeymoons,' says Major Burns. 'Mrs. Gallio don't; do you, Mrs. Gallio?'

More silence on my part. I *could* have stamped, but I don't think I did.

'Another story I heard,' says Dicker in his child's voice, 'is that the conveyance is really only two lifebuoys. Gallio's a famous swimmer. Can you swim, Mrs. Gallio? It's a long way down to Rangoon, but I should think it would be rather jolly to swim it. The water's quite warm, and you could fish as you went along.'

'Wait,' I say vindictively, turning round,

‘till you are all married. I’ll come to all your weddings and then I’ll tell your wives about you.’

There is a dead silence of dismay, and I turn again to look down the road. There is—he at last, driving up fast. They all see him.

‘Here he comes,’ they exclaim.

‘Don’t he drive fast?’ says the Dicker boy. ‘That pony of his, Scamp, hates the trap, and thinks if he only runs fast enough and clatters loudly enough with his hoofs that he will get away from it, leave it hanging on a rail or something. He is fearfully disgusted when he stops to find the beast of a thing has got there as soon as he has. But he has hopes for next time.’

I go to the steps and my—husband gets down and says ‘Lesbia, I am sorry I am late. There was a great deal to do.’

‘You are not late at all,’ I say, showing my watch, which I have secretly put back ten minutes. ‘You are exact, as you always like to be.’

If I hadn’t felt furious towards those other men before, I would now. I can see out of the back of my head that they are exchanging glances of awed admiration. Only young Dicker takes out his watch and is about to say something, but through some accident he falls with a great crash out of the verandah

instead. The other men look out at him reprovingly as he struggles amid the flower-pots.

'Has all your luggage gone down?' *he* asks. 'And your ayah?'

'Yes, everything of value,' I answer; 'there is only me left.'

'Then come along,' he says. 'Mrs. Stanford, you will give us fifteen minutes' law, please. Then we expect you all down on the river to drink our health and see us off. You will come?'

'Of course we are coming,' everybody says cheerfully. Then he gets into the trap. I climb in beside him, and without a moment's hesitation Scamp runs off with us.

We drive through the little station and down the village street without a word. Only I feel his shoulder touching mine sometimes as if to assure itself that I am there. I don't push back, I just bear it. We turn along the Strand Road and I see—it.

'Oh!' I say, 'is that it?'

He only nods.

'A raft!' I exclaim. 'We are going down on a raft! But it will take years!'

'No, only a moon,' he answers.

By that time we have arrived, and Scamp stops as if he knew the place. *He* jumps down, and would lift me down, only that I won't be lifted, and jump out. He pats the

pony and says good-bye to it, and Scamp is led away. Then we go down and on to the raft.

Certainly it is a wonderful raft. It is made of rough logs that have been felled in the mountains up above and brought down by the streams into the river. There they are caught and rafted into long rafts made of many joints. Ours has seven, each of some twenty logs tied together side by side. The logs are about twenty feet long, so that each joint is quite a comfortable size. The first joint has nothing on it ; it consists only of the bare logs and two big oars at the end. It is the second joint that we go on to by a little gangway, and here a thick framework of bamboo has been laid down to form a deck.

‘This is our forecastle,’ he says. ‘Here we will sit in the evenings and the early morning. How do you like it ?’

But I only nod.

‘Next is the salon.’ He leads me over a little bridge spanning the chasm between the joints, and we enter a fair-sized room. Its walls are of matting and its roof of thatch, but it all looks clean and white. It is nicely furnished too with camp furniture, tables, and chairs, and even a sideboard. There are rugs upon the floor and muslin curtains on the windows. Over the doors are curtains.

‘This is our dining- and drawing-room,’ he explains. ‘How do you like it ?’

I say that it is charming. And indeed it is charming, so fresh and pretty. There are even a few pictures on the walls and a bookcase with some books.

There are flowers on the table—quantities of flowers—roses and orchids and others I do not know.

‘Where did you get the flowers?’ I ask.

‘Presents,’ he answers. ‘Many people called to say good-bye, and all brought flowers. It is their charming custom. The roses make one think of home.’

When we have fully inspected the salon, we go on. There is a door at the back and another little bridge leading to a second building. We cross together.

At the door he hesitates a moment and looks at me.

‘Well?’ I ask. ‘What is this?’

He does not answer, but opens the door.

It is the bedroom. I knew of course it must be the bedroom—my bedroom, our bedroom, but I did not realise it till I entered. It is the same size as the salon, but it is divided. There is a curtain on rings that extends down the middle, making two compartments. He pushes the curtain, and we enter the right-hand compartment.

It is really beautifully furnished. I don't know how he got the things to this far corner of the world. I begin to suspect that there

was something in Mr. Roberts's suggestion of Maple. There is a little wardrobe, a dressing-table, a long mirror, all in delicate white wood that matches absolutely with the matting walls. There is a carpet on the floor. And there is a bed, the dearest little bed, with white counterpane and filmy mosquito-net tied with blue ribbons. In size my half is not much bigger than a ship's cabin, but it has a homely look, and I see that the ayah has already put out my brushes and other things. He must have told her, so that the place should not look bare to me at first sight. I do not need to tell him how pleased I am. He can see it, and he blushes with pleasure at my pleasure.

‘And—you?’ I ask.

He pulls the curtain aside. The other half is his, but how different. No carpet, no furniture, save a camp chair. His clothes are hung up on hooks on the wall, for he has no wardrobe. And his bed is just a plain folding camp-cot, with an Austrian striped blanket on it. Near the head of the bed is a rack holding his gun and rifle, and there is a row of boots.

‘Oh!’ I say, looking from him to his half.

‘Plain, but useful,’ he says—‘like the owner.’

‘But it looks so bare,’ I say.

‘Well,’ he says wistfully, ‘if you want to

give me something pleasant to look at, the curtain need not always be drawn.'

There is a little silence.

'What is beyond?' I ask at last.

'The bathrooms are next. Then on the next joint is the kitchen, then the servants, then the crew, and last of all an empty joint with oars, like at the bows.'

We go back into the salon, where his servants Po Chon and Po Ka are waiting for us. They are setting out glasses and decanters and tea-things for the visitors to come. There is also Spot, his fox-terrier, who has been brought down by the servants, and who reclaims his master with joy, but me somewhat coldly. I suppose he doesn't understand as yet, or perhaps he does and disapproves. His manner is stand-off.

'But where is Lady?' I inquire. 'Isn't she coming too?'

He shakes his head. 'There is her family,' he answers, 'four small blind creatures only a week old. I thought they would be in your way here, Lesbia, so I have left her behind. I sneaked out of the bungalow just now when she didn't know. She won't find out till I have gone. Bateson will care for her. She will miss me for a day or two, but her puppies will console her.'

As if to contradict his words, there is a scamper heard on the bank, a whining and

pattering. Then Lady jumps on to the raft, sniffs about and bursts into the room, rushes up to her master and goes into an ecstasy of joy. She jumps about and whines with delight at having found him, and tries to lick his hand. I laugh, while Po Chon and Po Ka regard her with sympathy. Her master catches hold of her and lifts her up.

'Lady,' he says severely, 'this is most scandalous.'

She droops her ears and lowers her tail. Evidently she recognises that it is scandalous, but doesn't intend to mind that.

'You have abandoned your family,' continues her master, 'your young family, to strangers, and preferred to come out on a pleasure jaunt with me. I cannot be a party to any such behaviour. Go back, madam. They will be crying their tongues out for you. Go back at once.' He puts her down.

Lady sees that matters are serious. She glances round for a place of refuge and then disappears into the bedroom and under his bed.

When Po Ka goes to bring her out, she bites him in the wrist, not viciously, for they are great friends, but despairingly, as if saying, 'I don't want to hurt you, but you *must* leave me alone.' So her master has to go and bring her out himself. Then she is delivered into the arms of a peon to be carried home, and

is borne off amid heartrending shrieks. All the people look at her with sympathy. Spot alone seems pleased. I am told that his family bores him. That is the sex all over. How men hate bother !

A few minutes later the station all come driving and riding down. I show them the deck and the salon, and they are much pleased. Mrs. Stanford says it is an ideal way to pass a honeymoon, and every one praises it except young Dicker. He adheres to a submarine as his ideal.

The women have tea, but the men say they want to drink our healths. I wonder why it can't be done in tea ? And why do women never drink each other's healths ? That is a curious question which just occurs to me, and it will be interesting to discuss it with him.

I seem to be discovering things I had not thought of before.

However, they all drink our healths in champagne and wish us good luck.

Young Dicker wants to make a speech, but is gently yet firmly put outside.

The women kiss me. The men look as if they would like to kiss me too, but daren't. So they shake hands instead.

Then, as it is time for us to start, they all go ashore and stand on the bank waiting to see us off.

There is a pulling up of stakes, a loosening

of ropes, and the raft begins to drift with the current.

Then I see the use of the oars. The crew pull at these oars, and the front of the raft is worked gradually away from the bank. It is hard and very slow work pulling the bows of a raft sideways. The space between us and the shore only widens very gradually.

But we are not off yet. There is a commotion up the road. Some one is running.

It is the peon who carried Lady back. He is running down towards us shouting. He is telling the people something, but they take no notice and only laugh. Then I see that he is pursuing a small white thing that scampers in front of him. It must be Lady, escaped. He calls to those in front to catch or stop her, but instead they make a way for her. I can see she has something in her mouth which she carries very gingerly.

She reaches the shore, measures the foot or two of water that already divides us from the land, clears it with a jump and looks round, makes up in her mind the proper thing to do, runs up to me and deposits her puppy in my lap. 'Just mind that for a minute,' she says. Then in a perfect ecstasy of delight that she has solved the problem, she goes and lies down at her master's feet.

'Lesbia,' he says. 'Your sex will have its

way. You see. Are we to have Lady and her family with us ?'

'We must,' I say, stroking the queer, squeaking little blind creature in my lap. 'You can't send her back again. She is determined to go with you, and as you wouldn't take her alone she has brought one puppy. Better send for the others.'

'Very well,' he says, and gives orders.

We move so slowly that the peon has time to go back to the house and, bringing down the other puppies in their basket, overtake us in a canoe and put them on board.

Lady receives them as a matter of course, counts them, licks them, and then, quite satisfied, goes to sleep under a chair.

Our company is complete. The raft moves on, quickening its march as it gets more into the current. We wave a last good-bye to those on shore. They cheer.

Then we pass round the bend. There are the hills on either side, the forest, and the river. There are ourselves—alone.

CHAPTER III

‘He has a flame in his heart and a mystery in his head,
for it appears that he is in love.’

HAFIZ.

III



O at last the ceremony and the fuss were over. Lesbia was mine, I hers, as far as rites could make us so. Society had given each to the other, and our future lay in her hands and in mine. It was now with us to make reality out of a form, to find the substance hid beneath vague words, to change two units into one. We gave ourselves unto the river of our fate and let it bear us on.

We passed from civilisation into nature's heart. The golden afternoon filled all the river gorges with warm light. We seemed to lie quite still on sleeping waters. It was the hills that moved; the capes, the rocks, the forest that defiled on either side, opening in front, closing in behind as we passed on.

‘Lesbia,’ I said.

Her eyes sought mine.

‘Are you content?’

Her fingers closed on mine and loosed again.

‘No one can see us,’ I said. ‘You can do more than that.’

She looked about her. The salon hid us from all behind. On either side was forest, and sometimes long strips of rice-fields stretching up long ravines.

‘Oh no,’ she said, shaking her head. ‘You must behave in public.’

‘That’s an excuse,’ I cried.

‘Excuse? For what?’ Her wide eyes opened with a child’s surprise, but I saw a mock within their blue.

‘You know, Lesbia,’ I said, ‘you are mine. How long I’ve waited hungry and thirsty both. I want to take you in my arms.’

‘Oh no,’ she said, and shook her head. ‘Aren’t we quite comfortable as we are?’

I looked at her. She lay on her deck-chair in listless ease, the soft curves of her form showing beneath the light dress that she wore. From her dainty feet, in absurd little pointed shoes, up to the last curl of her hair, so fresh, so sweet, and so mysterious. She was an enigma wrapped in flesh, a riddle in a dress, and mine the reading. Her cheeks were a little flushed, there was a wrinkle in her forehead; her eyes were bright and full of a soft defiance.

‘Lesbia,’ I said; ‘do you know why I married you?’

She shook her head. ‘I was never good

at riddles. Was it because no other girl was brave enough to take you ?'

'No !' I said indignantly. 'It was because of your hair.'

'Why my hair ?' she asked.

'I like its colour, its changing colour. Sometimes it is like gold, and sometimes it is like fire. I like red hair. Of all red hair I ever saw, I adore yours most. I married you because I want to have red hair to stroke, to twine about my fingers, to hold up against the sun. I want it for my very own. It has been my dream from childhood.'

'Oh, but you can't,' she said. 'It would make me untidy. I would never let you do that.'

'Not even to gratify an aesthetic taste ?'

'Not even for that,' she answered.

I sighed. 'Then there is your skin,' I continued. 'Do you know, Lesbia,' I said confidentially, 'that in the evening when you wear a low dress your shoulders are as white as white. You have the most adorable shoulder-blades. They are not a dead white like marble or like wax, but a soft white. There is a night moth that is white like that, and when you touch its wings the white comes off like star-dust. It is really down, just like a dove's, only so very small. Have you feathers on your shoulders, and will they come off ?'

'I suppose,' she said sedately, 'that this is really a roundabout way of asking if I use powder?'

'It isn't that at all,' I remonstrated. 'It is that I am very fond of natural history and have an inquiring mind. Didn't you know that?'

'It is a cruel pursuit,' said Lesbia.

'On the contrary,' I urged, 'it is the outcome of a kind and loving heart. It is fraught with real benefits to mankind. It elevates the student.'

'I speak from the point of view of the specimen,' retorted Lesbia.

'That is a selfish point of view.'

'Are not you selfish too?' she said.

'The specimens like it,' I urged.

She shook her head. 'It is just a cruel curiosity,' she said.

'It comes from a true desire for knowledge. I want to know.'

'Whether it comes off?'

'Exactly.'

She didn't answer, only moved her shoulders suggestively under their muslin and looked more defiant still.

The afternoon wore slowly on, its glamour growing. The passion of the day grew deeper as it drew towards its close. The strength and effort of the noon had passed into the glory of a deed accomplished, and the breeze was still.

The sunlight on the hills was warmer, richer, and there were shadows in the vales.

There came into the blood a glow that made the heart beat and the pulses throb. A silence took us.

And yet at length within the silence there grew a tension and a strain we could not bear, a growing impulse that must find expression.

‘Why don’t you talk?’ she asked.

I shook my head. ‘I feel so stupid.’

‘Why are you stupid? You have usually so much to say.’

‘Because—because——’

‘Because of what?’

‘Lesbia,’ I said, ‘long, long ago there was a king who had a favourite page. His name was Selim. He was the life and joy of all the Court, because he laughed, because he talked, because he was always merry. Then suddenly he became dumb, and in a day or two he disappeared.’

Lesbia opened her eyes.

‘The king sent to seek him, and at last the vizier came with news. ‘Selim is in the desert. He sits and stares out to the far horizon where the camels go. He neither eats nor speaks.’ ‘What has come over him?’ the king inquired. ‘Is my page ill?’ The vizier laughed. ‘He is not ill—and yet. He hath a mystery in his head, and in his heart a

flame.' The king looked astonished. 'For Selim is in love.'

A silence.

'Lesbia, that was what the vizier said. "Selim is in love."'

She smiled ; then suddenly she raised to me eyes humid with her thoughts, and cast them down again.

We drifted on. In long, slow procession passed islets and capes, pagodas bright with gold, and carven monasteries, the huts of fishermen, and far behind the hills. The purple wine of evening filled the valleys to their brim.

'Please talk,' she said suddenly, almost with tears. 'Please talk, please laugh. I feel as though my soul were drawing out from me into the sunset. Will you not stop it?'

She placed her hand upon her heart.

I moved my chair up nearer. What could I say but childish things? When the heart is full you dare not let it find expression in the deepest words ; and therefore you must laugh, as the sea does ; you must have ripples on the surface, so that you yourself may not realise what is below.

'Lesbia,' I said, 'I want to learn a great many more things.'

She shook her head. 'That's just like a man. As if there were any use in learning things.'

'Nice things,' I said.

She glanced half-doubtfully at me.

'Things about you,' I said.

Lesbia kept silent.

'You should ask, "What sort of things?"'

I suggested.

But no. She only smiled. In vain is the net spread in the sight of any bird. Instead of that she made a base diversion.

'You want perhaps to know,' she suggested, 'what there will be for dinner!'

'Lesbia!' I cried, revolted; 'the cook and Po Chon will be responsible for dinner. Your duties are not begun yet, only your privileges.'

'Oh!' said Lesbia, 'I am glad of that. I didn't know a specimen had any privileges.'

'A specimen is all privileges,' I continued.

No answer.

'Besides I am not hungry—not for that kind of food anyhow.'

'Perhaps you want a drink,' she insinuated.

'I don't *approve*, but I won't *object*.'

'Lesbia,' I said, pulling my chair up close to hers, 'I want to eat *you*.'

'Oh,' she returned calmly, 'I am not good to eat. Besides I am raw. You wouldn't eat me raw?'

'I would.'

'I have always heard men never thought of anything but eating,' she replied, 'but

I didn't know it went so far as—as cannibalism.'

'Oh yes,' I said; 'quite as far as that, in certain cases.'

'Now with me it's different,' she continued. 'I am hungry too; but it is because I didn't eat any breakfast.'

'Why not?' I asked.

'Because it was our wedding breakfast.'

'All the more reason you should eat,' I answered. 'I did; my last bachelor meal, of course I ate.'

'I saw you,' she replied. 'With me it is different. But I suppose that men never really understand anything. I didn't eat breakfast—there, never mind why—and so I am hungry now. But I am not like you; my tastes are simple and vegetarian. I will be satisfied now with cakes and tea.'

'Very well,' I said submissively, 'I will tell Po Chon.' I rang the gong, and when Po Chon came, I told him to bring tea. 'Bring fruit,' I said, 'and cakes and jam.'

He brought two little tables and set them out between us. He did it as he had always done for me. Lesbia said nothing, but I think later she will make changes. Poor Po Chon, his easy days are gone.

She poured out tea.

'Do you know,' I asked her, 'what you are doing?'

She raised her eyebrows. 'You are full of riddles—pouring out tea am I not?'

'You are officiating,' I returned, 'at your first family meal. You are presiding for the first time at your own table. It marks an epoch.'

'True,' she said. 'Does Po Chon always give you powdered sugar to put in your tea?'

'The sugar is for the fruit,' I explained. 'I don't take sugar in my tea, thanks.'

'I do,' said Lesbia.

I rang the gong loudly and hastily. When Po Chon came, the dreadful fact was discovered that there was no lump-sugar. In fact, I never had any. For coffee I prefer brown sugar. Po Chon suggested telegraphing from Katha, where we arrive to-morrow. Lesbia made mental notes. But what she *said* was, 'It doesn't matter. It's just the same sugar really. It's only a matter of form having it in lumps.'

'Only a matter of form, indeed,' I thought; 'and woman's life is made up of forms. Yet she pretends to disregard it. What can be the matter with Lesbia? Yet she looks as calm as calm.' However we had tea.

And the raft moved on.

The sun bent down towards its setting; shadows grew from out the hills and spread across the earth. We passed a village now and then and saw the signs of evening. Light

films of smoke rose up from fires where housewives cooked the suppers for the men. From the fields cattle came slowly home; they raised a dust which turned to crimson haze and hung in the still air. Men crossed the fields, converged towards the gates, weary with work, glad of the coming rest. On the village front the girls came down to draw the evening water. They waded into the shallows and they watched us pass. We bent around a cape and entered a long reach that seemed to go straight to the sunset's heart. It was a golden way that led up to a glory. All the world throbbed with the passion of the sun going unto his rest. His couch was hung with curtains of rose-red, the bars were gold. The passion died into a languor, and the sun was gone. Yet his flush lingered in the sky, and in the midst a star.

For long neither of us spoke, only we watched.

Then as the dark was nearly come, the raftsmen thought of mooring for the night. With the long sweeps they moved the raft towards the shore. There was a bank of sand between us and the forest.

They landed with a rope tied to a stake, and dug it deep into the sand, holding the stake's end. The raft moved on, dragging the stake like a great plough through the loose

sand. And so, by little and by little, our progress was arrested, and we lay close in beside the bank. There they made us fast to posts deep driven into the soil.

The raft had come to rest, but beside us and beneath us the river still flowed on. It lapped against our logs in a low song; it swayed and rocked us.

Above, the stars came out, the myriad eyes that watch and see all things, and laugh and then forget. For they look always forward and never back. The past is passed, and the future is to come.

Slowly the light faded utterly. The hills were hidden in the night, the forest disappeared.

Yet was not the river dark. It had a light upon its face, that came I know not whence. It may be some faintest phosphorescence of its waters or the sheen of stars reflected there. I do not know. It made the river like a mystic way across the dark.

And from a village on the other side lights twinkled redly and happily. They were the lamps of homes.

CHAPTER IV

‘Desire in the beginning came upon her, which was the first seed of thought.’

Veda.

IV



UR cabin looks quite cheerful with the lamps Po Chon has lit. He has even put fairy-lamps upon the dinner-table and decked it out with flowers. Later on I will arrange the flowers myself, but for to-night it does not matter. It is a relief to pass for a while within four walls out of the distances of the night, to see familiar homely things instead of the hills, to feel a roof above instead of stars. This great nature that he cares for so much is strange to me. I know town better than country, streets than lanes, roofs than hills. Even in the country at home, man and his work is always the first thing evident. And the distances one can see are short. In this clear air I seem to see into infinity, and become lost in these great vistas. So that my eye seeks always the village, the cottage, or the monastery first, and nature is to me but a vague background to humanity. To him it has a reality of its own, and a personality.

He seems to feel as if there were in truth a spirit in all things, in hills, in rivers, trees, and flowers. But I feel comfort only in the sight or the remembrance of a home. It brings me back into myself.

‘My friend,’ I say as we go in, ‘there is a homeliness about a room, a dinner-table, and Po Chon, that your river lacks.’

‘Yes, you are strangers yet,’ he says.

‘Who?’

‘You and the river.’

I laugh. ‘You talk as if it lived, this river.’

He only smiles in answer.

‘Where do I sit?’ I ask. But I need not ask. Po Chon has settled that himself. He has put a cushion in the chair he thinks I ought to occupy. Who is to manage things, I wonder, in future, Po Chon or myself? I think I will.

He does not talk. He is distrait. This vexes me. It is stupid to be so at one’s first dinner. I wonder if this is his real self coming out. I try to talk, to be gay, to laugh. He only answers in monosyllables, and looks at me. His look annoys me, but I have to bear it because it shows he admires me. A wife seems to have a good deal to put up with, and I am already beginning to find it out. I suppose it is because I am his wife now that he won’t take the trouble to entertain me. Are these his family manners? He

looks so gloomy that I could throw things at him.

He will not eat. I, on the contrary, am hungry and eat well. The soup is excellent. I wonder how Anthony, his Madras cook, manages. I will inquire—later. How glad I am that all the trouble of getting married is over. The service tired me, but the wedding breakfast tired me still more, and the saying good-bye. It is horrid to be stared at and joked at. Now we should be quietly settling down into that friendship which is marriage. Yet he is moody. I don't know why.

‘My friend,’ I say, ‘what is the matter?’

‘Nothing,’ he answers.

‘Are you not well?’

That seems to annoy him. A man hates to be told he isn't well.

‘I am quite well, thanks,’ he says. ‘Why do you ask?’

‘Because you don't seem quite your usual self.’

‘I'm not,’ he answers.

‘Why not?’ I ask.

He looked surprised at my question. ‘My usual self to date has been a bachelor,’ he answers, ‘an entity in myself. To-day I am to be more and more merged with some one else in a compound corpuscle called marriage.’

‘Oh,’ I say, ‘that is already done. We were married at ten o'clock. C'est un fait

accompli, monsieur. And after all it is not very alarming, and I do not notice that I have changed much.'

He looks at me curiously.

'Then in your opinion,' he asks, 'the act of marriage is completed?'

'Certainly,' I answer with wide open eyes. 'The church service is complete in itself, isn't it?'

'Oh, as far as a ceremony goes,' he says carelessly.

I am bewildered. I do not know what he means, but think he is only teasing me. He seems upset about something. I dare say it has been a troublesome day for him.

'True,' I replied, 'it was very trying. But it is all past now. It is done and finished. Why bother about the past?'

'Done and finished? the past?' And he opens his eyes.

'Of course,' I say, and smile at him to try and coax him into a good temper. Though why he should require coaxing, I don't know.

But it is not any use. He just glooms. I think it is the stupidest dinner I ever sat down to. If I had known he would be like this, I don't know if I should have married. But he was never like this before. I suppose, now we are married, he thinks he can take off his mask and show himself in his true colours.

The river-fish and the fowl and the snipe

are as excellent as the soup. The only sweet, however, is a custard pudding which I don't like, as it is badly cooked. 'Doesn't Anthony know about sweets?' I ask. 'All the beginning of the dinner is good, but not the sweets.'

'I don't eat sweets,' he replies.

'No, but I do,' I answer.

Evidently he leaves all the housekeeping to Po Chon, for as far as his own thought goes, he has considered me in every way. But Po Chon has not realised that a new member with tastes of her own has come into the household. Hence the want of lump-sugar and puddings.

He says something in Burmese to Po Chon, and they have a long conversation. I don't understand a word of it, of course. This is my table, and I am the mistress of this raft, yet I am an outsider. That annoys me. I must put that right soon. I seem to be a guest in my husband's house; it should be the other way about. The woman owns the house, and the man is the stranger and the guest. I wonder if I shall ever get him to understand this. He has been master of his house and servants so long that he won't like giving them up. He won't want to give them up. But of course he must. I wonder, however, about Po Chon and Po Ka. Will they take to a mistress instead of a master after fourteen years of the latter? I am

beginning to make maxims for wives. 'Don't marry a man who has old servants.' That is quite a good maxim.

As he won't talk, I have to occupy myself with reflections and with eating. I am sorry when dinner is done. I even eat a second pear to make the time last longer, though I don't want it really.

When it is finished he says, 'Suppose we go outside?'

But I have for the present had enough of that vague outside. I prefer the four walls and the lights and the companionship of the furniture. I am not afraid here. 'You can smoke here,' I say to pacify him. I then make myself comfortable in a cane-chair in one corner of the room. I rather wish I had some work to occupy my fingers. For he won't talk. Instead of that, after Po Chon has cleared away, he draws his chair quite close to mine and strokes my hair. I can't bear that. It makes me feel hot and cold all over. 'Please don't,' I say. Then he strokes my hand and arm, which is worse. I suppose I am tired, for his touch burns me and makes me very uncomfortable.

'Please go and sit over the other side of the room,' I ask him. 'We can talk quite well across the table. I don't like being touched.'

'Why not?' he asks.

'Well, I am not accustomed to it. I don't

like being pawed about, and it isn't quite polite.'

'But you are mine,' he says.

'Indeed I'm not,' I say indignantly; 'I am no one's property but my own. A wife is not a *thing*.'

He stares at me apparently perplexed.

'My friend,' I say pleadingly, 'I am tired. You have had a number of kisses to-day. Let me have a rest now until to-morrow at breakfast. Let us talk a little and then go to bed. We will meet quite fresh at breakfast, and I will kiss you good-morning if you are good.'

He only stares at me.

I get up and make a chair comfortable for him at the opposite corner to mine, putting a cushion in it and a little table beside it. 'There,' I say, 'sit down here and we will have a chat across the room before we say good-night.'

He doesn't answer anything. He gets up and goes out abruptly and I am left alone.

I sit alone and wonder. At first I am irritated. True husband-manners, I suppose. Well, let him go. I am happier alone.

It is a very comfortable cabin and a cosy chair.

But it is a little dull—for one's wedding night. I wonder what is the matter with him to go away like that. He must be in an

awful rage, for I hear him breaking things outside. How like a man! What have I done? Has he any right to be angry? I have more right. He treats me as if I were a nice child, petting and fondling, and then when I object, leaving me as if I were a naughty child. How dare he? I am quite grown up now, over twenty, and I know a great deal—far more than he does. I don't mean about stupid things like business or government, but about life and human nature—at least about ordinary human nature; but husbands don't seem to be made of ordinary human nature. They are worse.

Oh I am lonely!

Is it for him? No, it can't be that. I expect it is being on a raft. I am not accustomed to rafts. That must be it. If it were a house, I would not mind. I suppose he expects me to follow him out. I won't. He must learn that he can't have it all his own way. If he likes to go out and be alone with his river and his temper, I don't mind.

I *don't* mind.

I am quite happy here by myself.

And I won't go after him. After him, indeed!

I feel very tired. It's getting late. I have a good mind to go to bed and leave him out

there. When we next meet, at breakfast, he will have recovered his equanimity. It would serve him right.

I—have—a—very—good—mind. . . .

II

When I left Lesbia and went outside, it was so dark after the lamps inside that I could not see. One of the small tables naturally took advantage of this and got in my way, so that I fell over it. I hurt myself a good deal, but I hurt the table far more, I am glad to say. I smashed it right up and threw the pieces into the river. That was a relief.

I had always hated that table anyhow.

How could a man ever understand a girl? It wasn't so much what they were and what they knew, as what they weren't and what they didn't know. A man married, expecting to find certain things in his wife. It seemed to him part of the contract that he should find them. Apparently he didn't. They weren't there.

If they were to come there, he would have to put them there himself. That seemed to me unfair.

If a person undertook to play a game with you, naturally you would expect that she knew what the game was and had some inkling of

the rules. Suppose you engaged a girl for a dance, and, when you went to claim her, found that she considered that a mutual writing of names on programmes was the main thing, and that for the rest, you went out for a walk, on opposite sides of the street.

Suppose you engaged a peach or an apricot to come to you and be eaten, but when she came you found her fixed idea was that she was to be placed under a glass case on a side-board. It wasn't fair to bring up girls like that, it wasn't fair to us. Society has no right to deliberately and intentionally blind and pervert a girl in that way. Nature gave her eyes. She could not have lived for twenty years without seeing things and wondering about them. Why did they tell her falsehoods, try to kill in her all natural instinctive knowledge?

She had been brought up a nihilist. The result is that I must have appeared odious to her. It put me in a false light. I felt furious.

And do neither the mothers who keep them ignorant up to the very end, nor the girls who enter into a contract they do not understand and have no intention of keeping, think of the profound wickedness of what they do?

Suppose Lesbia is like some other women, and refuses to listen to reason and to instinct? What is to be done? Like most men, to live in daily intimacy with a woman who was not

my wife in fact would be for me a physical impossibility.

Unless Lesbia's trust in me and her natural sense and instinct rise superior to the stupid ignorance in which she has been allowed to enter into the marriage contract, both our lives are ruined. We must separate as soon as possible. And how many men's lives have not been so ruined ! The world is full of them.

The trouble about cigars was that they never did draw. That was three I had to throw away, and my case was empty. There was a box in the salon, but . . . there was a lion in the path.

The darkness of the night was soothing, and its great spaces gave one rest. It is impossible to be angry long in the face of nature—she who bears all things without complaint, with dignity and courage. One feels so small in face of her. And if we allow what seems to us our superiority, our intellect, to be clouded, we become contemptible. Nature is never in a rage. She has her storms, but even in them, perhaps even more in them, she keeps her dignity.

Between four walls passion is pent and waxes ; it echoes from them back to us ; we can fill a room with rage. But outside, it radiates away and passes into forgetfulness.

Besides, there are the stars that watch. I became quite calm.

I wondered what she was doing. I felt more sorry for her than for myself even. Poor child! What was she thinking of? It was hard for her. To live a life for twenty years, to form a theory of life, and then to have it shattered.

Yet it had to be shattered, for my sake and for hers. It was in the necessity of things that it must be so. Happiness lay beyond. And I had to do it. She would forgive me—after.

But now. What must I do? My courage had all gone. How ever could I go back into the salon and begin? I feared I might get angry again, and I didn't want to do that.

I didn't want to go back into that room.

Of course I could have said I came for the cigars.

But I was sure that she would guess it wasn't true—or be angry that it was.

'Suppose I call her,' I thought.

'But what if she doesn't come?' thought answered.

'Besides, I am the injured person; she should come without calling,' said I to thought.

I concluded I would stay there a while yet. There was no hurry.

But it was getting late.

What of that? I couldn't help its getting

late. It wasn't my fault. I had no control over time. I could not stop its getting even later if it wanted to. Anyhow, I was very comfortable out there.

Only rather lonely.

III

I haven't heard him move for ever so long. Perhaps he is asleep. Anyhow, I can't sit here any longer. I am tired and shall go to bed. But I will preserve my temper and my manners even if he has lost his. I will go just as far as the door and say 'Good-night' to him. Then I will go to bed.

CHAPTER V

‘One night, one night . . . aye men have said it, maketh
tame a woman in a man’s arms.’

EURIPIDES.

‘And Zeus gave Psyche to Eros to be his wife and to
follow him for ever, for the Soul is ever one with Love.’

Greek Legend.



THE darkness of the night had lifted now ; there was a faint radiance that came down and filled all spaces. Dimly the hills appeared that held the river, and far off the mountains were outlined against the starlit sky. The voices of the night began to talk. The river drew her waters, with a rustle and a stir they lapped against the bank ; a night wind whispered to the palms. Then there were other voices, inarticulate, yet heard. Whence come the voices of the night ? Who knows ?

Within all things there is a life that is akin to that which is within us. The World Father lives in all His world, and there is nothing without Him. But who shall explain it or define ? The deeper things of life are hidden things that will not come up to no words. You feel, you know, but no one ever tells.

Therefore the seers wrote legend and wrote parable. The fool hears but the words, but

he whose heart is opened hears the echo underneath, the music and the song of truth.

Words are but flesh. Plain words might be an outrage, sometimes they might be the deepest of untruths. An outer likeness may well hold an inner falsehood. True words are those which stir the true emotion and the heart. Truth is an inward thing ; it is part of the Inward Light within the heart that makes us glad. To say all and say nothing, dependent on the hearer—that is the perfect truth.

The river moved, swaying the raft in a long rhythm, and stilled again.

A secret presence stole into my senses—I looked up. Lesbia was there. How she came there, how long had waited, I did not know. Perfectly silently she stood, touching my arm, her dress a white film in the dark.

I rose and put my arms about her. She made no resistance, and I lifted her and placed her in the long cane-chair and knelt beside her. For a moment she lay quite still, then as if awaking to existence she half sat up and said :

‘I only came to say “Good-night.”’

‘The night,’ I said, ‘is neither yours to give nor mine to take. The night is ours, yours and mine, Lesbia. It cannot be divided.’

‘I am so tired,’ she complained, ‘please let me go.’

‘You shall not go,’ I said ; ‘I will never let

you go. But you may rest. Lie still and be content.'

I pressed her gently, she fell back. I laid my arm beneath her head for cushion.

'Look at the night,' I said. 'The stars are eyes that watch and laugh. They always laugh, for they know more than we do and see farther.'

'My eyes are tired,' said Lesbia.

'Close them,' I said, 'and listen.'

'I am *all* tired,' she answered; 'I cannot talk.'

'You need not talk, I will not let you talk, but you must listen.'

'To what?'

'To me.'

'What will you tell me?' Her eyes, wide opened, looked straight up to mine.

'A fairy tale.'

Her face was close to mine. I heard her laugh. 'As if I were a child and you were to tell me tales to make me sleep?'

'You are,' I said, 'a child.'

'No, no,' she said, 'I am grown up.'

'Those whom the gods love never grow up,' I answered. 'They keep their child's desire for truth until they die.'

'I want to sleep,' she said.

'My tale will make you wake,' I answered. 'It is so true, so true.'

'Are fairy stories true?'

'Nothing could be more true than they are.'

‘ I have heard them all.’

‘ But never held the key. Now I will let you into a new world where you have never come.’

‘ Is that world beautiful ?’

‘ It is the world of fairy, the most beautiful there is, and true.’

She closed her eyes, she moved a little nearer me, relaxed in self-abandonment.

‘ Tell me,’ she murmured.

‘ Once upon a time,’ I said, ‘ long, long ago, there was a Princess.’

‘ Had she a name ?’

‘ I will tell you her name later. You must not interrupt, nor question ; no, nor think, but listen.’

She lay quite still in acquiescence.

‘ She was all beautiful. I cannot tell you how beautiful she was. Her face, her form were perfect, like a dream of loveliness—in snow.’

She made a movement of surprise. ‘ In snow ?’

‘ Hush !—Yes, in snow. She was cold as snow. No blood moved in her veins, only cold ichor ; in her eyes there was no fire, no warmth came from her, for her heart was sealed.’

‘ Who sealed it ?’

‘ Lesbia,’ I said, ‘ didn’t I tell you not to ask questions ?’

‘ A child asks questions. You say I am a child. And your fairy tale interests me. Who sealed her heart ?’

‘It was born sealed. Therefore she never heard it nor felt it, nor knew she had a heart, full of hot blood that some day would be loosed, to course through all her veins and give her life.’

‘*Didn't* she know of this heart?’

‘No,’ I said.

‘Did no one tell her?’

‘No one. They did not want her to know. They were afraid that she might guess, or see. Therefore they kept her in a garden quite enclosed, and more, they bandaged her eyes to make her blind, and told her if she took it off that she would see the devil and be sure to end in death.’

‘Why did they do that?’

‘I am not sure.’

‘Was it right to do so?’

‘I am a man and cannot tell. She was a girl.’

‘Go on.’

‘They did more than that. They told her that the bandage made her see more clearly than if her eyes were free. For they had painted images upon the inside of her bandage and told her they were real.’

Silence.

‘And she believed it. Then came a Prince. He wooed the Princess and he won her. So he took her with him out of her garden. They came into the world and passed into a forest. There they were quite alone.’

‘Take off your bandage,’ said the Prince.
‘Look at the world and me.’

‘I am afraid,’ she sighed ; ‘the world is evil.’

‘It is God’s world,’ the Prince replied. ‘He lives in it.’

‘They told me that God lived in Heaven, far off, not here,’ she answered.

‘They told you wrong ; open and you will see.’

‘I will not look,’ she said. ‘I fear the devil.’

‘Your beauty is all cold,’ he said, ‘your heart beats not.’

‘What is a heart ?’ she asked.

‘That which gives life,’ he answered ; ‘my heart beats strongly and it longs for answer. You have a heart as strong maybe as mine. But it is sealed. Will you not let me loose it ?’

‘I am afraid,’ she answered.

But the Prince replied. ‘How can we live together if I have sight and you are blind—if I am warm and you are cold ?’

‘It is your fault,’ she answered. ‘You should be like me. It is much safer.’

And the Prince cried : ‘Who cares for safety ? The only safety is in death. But danger—that is love and life. Let me give you Life and Light, Beloved !’

She shuddered and she would not.

‘I will bring light into your eyes. I will break open the sealed fountain of your heart

and make it beat ; bring blushes to your clear white cheeks and warmth into your bosom.'

'But that is sin,' she sobbed. 'I will keep my whiteness and my purity. That is my beauty ; that is what I value more than all things. I would sooner die than lose it.' She would have pushed her Prince away.

She would have pushed him far away, for ever.

I felt Lesbia sigh a long-drawn tremulous sigh near to a sob.

'What did her Prince do, Lesbia ?'

She did not answer. I thought I felt her arm close round me, drawing me more near.

'What should that Prince do ?'

I put my lips close to her ear. 'He loves her. What should that Prince do ?'

Was it by chance or just some touch of my imagination that her cheek for a moment brushed against my lips ?

But no answer.

'Then I will tell you what he did. He held the Princess in his arms all despite herself and tore the bandage from her eyes.'

In the deep silence, I could hear far off a stag that belled up to the night.

A silver light along the hills was herald of the moon.

Her whisper was so low it hardly reached my ears.

‘ Did she let him do it ? ’

‘ She heard his voice and all despite herself she let him do his will.’

‘ Did it hurt her much ? ’

‘ I do not know, Lesbia, I do not know. Perhaps it did.’

‘ But if he loved her, why did he hurt her ? ’

‘ Because he loved her.’

‘ And she, why did she let him do it ? ’

‘ Because she loved him and because, despite herself, she trusted him.’

‘ What did she see ? ’

‘ She saw the Prince.’

‘ And did she know him ? ’

‘ Not at first. She thought he was the devil. They had told her that the devil was like that. She cried.’

‘ How did she learn the truth ? ’

‘ He held her firmly, so that she should not go. Then when her eyes grew stronger, she could see he was her husband.’

Through the still night I heard a sound. It was a heart that beat. Whose heart I did not know, her heart or mine, one heart. It beat so loud it seemed articulate as a sob.

Her cheek against my cheek grew warm and soft, and when I kissed her lips they did not say me nay.

At last she whispered: 'What was the name of the Princess?'

'Her name was Eve, was Woman. She was also called The Sleeping Beauty and Galatea and many another name—and You.'

'And his name?'

'Adam and the Prince, Pygmalion and Paris—and I.'

She thought and thought.

'But your tale is not the same as the old legend. It was Eve who gave man the fruit, saying "eat."'

'So does she now and ever.'

'No, no! It is not true.'

I laughed. 'Yet it is true. You give, you offer. The ripple of your hair, your cheeks, your lips, the languor of your eyes, your every movement is an urgent invitation.'

'But not intentional.'

'More true for that. For it is the Love eternal that calls, through finite you, will you or nill you. It is the creative passion trembling in your veins, that which has built and builds the world, and will have its way despite our ignorance and negations. Your eyes are shut as yet. Its eyes are open, and it calls in you. Your very fragrance intoxicates and draws me as the clover's does the bee.'

'I cannot help it,' she said pitifully.

'No, fortunately. Therefore you must submit to its consequences.'

No answer.

‘ Will you, sweetheart ? ’

A pause. I hardly knew if it were the night wind or a ripple on the stream that answered ‘ Yes.’

Then I felt on my lips a kiss, warm as a sun-steeped rose—there was a stir, a rustle—and I was alone.

The moon had risen. Over the hills there hung a silver shield half-shadowed on one side.

She looked upon the world, wrapped in her mystery ; she looked on hill, on field, on river, and she looked on me.

The moon laughed down at me, but I—I laughed back at the moon.

II

I hear the river move and talk beneath my bed. It bubbles through the logs that form the raft, and sings its slumber song. It falls, it rises. Sometimes the raft swings to and fro by some strange impulse from the waters that has no explanation.

I hear strange night-birds cry far off, a sad complaint that echoes like a moan. I hear innumerable things I never heard before. My senses seem so keen, they hurt. I hear my heart beat, and I never heard it beat before.

I shiver and lie cramped upon my bed. My flesh creeps and my skin is hot and cold.

There seems to be a web of nerves newborn that tingles everywhere within me, and I am conscious of my whole self as I have never been before.

My hands crisp and my feet are cold.

This must be fear. Yes, it is fear. Nothing but fear could make me as I am. How terrible it is to be afraid. Why does the world hold things that make one fear? Why is not life just calm and quiet always? Oh that I were where I was yesternight!

Yet is it fear?

I did not know before that fear could be so beautiful a thing.

How the raft creaks!

Is it the raft?

My ears are full of noises, and I cannot hear quite clearly. Let me hold my breath and listen.

It is the curtain rings that move.

Ah! Heart of my heart.

III

Again I was without, watching the night. My eyes were watching it, but in my desire I was with Lesbia there within. Was she asleep, or did she wake and think and think? What were her thoughts?

Did there come into them, as into mine, visions of things unknown, in that far future we had made our own this night? Did any echo come from out the void of that which was to be?

We had claimed our share in all the years to come, when we ourselves had passed into the sea. Our call had gone; when would the answer come, and who the answer?

Did it sleep now upon the knees of God, to waken for us later?

Only the Future knew.

The moon from out her zenith sloped towards the west, false dawn woke in the sky—and died; and then the true dawn came. Out of the darkness mountains showed themselves, and the grey river grew once more into the sight.

I stood upright and plunged into its depths. The cool, fresh waters closed about me, giving life. I rose up to the surface and I swam against the current. I laughed. I tried to leap out of the water like a fish for very joy. I dived again, under the raft, and came up at the other side.

Then the sun rose.

There never was a dawn like that in all the world before.

As I crept back into my cabin, I drew the curtain slightly, and I looked at Lesbia.

She lay upon her side facing towards me. Her hair upon the pillow made a warm halo, and one arm was bare. Her form lay all relaxed in utmost lassitude. She looked so tired, so tired. She was as a great tropic lily some one had plucked and brought into his room, all for his pleasure, careless of its pain.

My heart went out to her in strong compassion.

I saw her eyelids lift a little, and she looked at me. A mist as of night-tears still lay on them. But within I saw the mockery had come back.

She closed them quickly, and she sighed. She sighed? she laughed? I don't know which.

I felt like a burglar who has robbed a church. But after all sometimes a burglary is good—especially of a church.

I dropped the curtain.

Then I went to sleep, and slept as I never slept before.

CHAPTER VI

‘Temples not made with hands.’

VI



It is three o'clock, and we are sitting in the verandah of our salon watching the river. We have sat here since noon almost in silence, our chairs quite close together. Sometimes he says a word, a phrase, and I reply, or only smile, and then we fall back into the silence which yet has beneath its surface a close communion.

The river takes us on. First through a long defile where the hills rise sheer out of the water, where there are cliffs and precipices. There is a grandeur here, a stillness and a majesty beyond all words. It is as if the river were passing through some secret hour of life, that which makes thoughts that it will take with it for ever. This is a real cathedral where God lives, as He lives everywhere in life, but not in mortuaries of a dead Christ. There is a rocky islet at the end, whereon a carven monastery stands, with shaven monks for guardians. That is the defile's portal.

And the gateway passed, the river flows into a broad and sunlit valley, where there are fields and flowers and villages.

I hear a sound and cannot tell what it may be nor whence it comes. It is a rhythmic beat, strong and yet hardly audible, as of a drum far heard at night. It grows.

It seems to come from out the very water at our feet, as if borne up from the depths, escaping from the ripples as they break upon the raft.

Yet the river is quite still and smooth, save for the wavelets that a little breeze makes dance upon the surface. I can see nothing to account for it.

I look at him in question.

'It is the steamer,' he replies, 'coming from above. She is still in the defile and out of sight—the water brings the sound.'

'But it seems *in* the water.'

'Yes,' he answers, 'is it not strange? It seems to come out of the river depths, as if some ghostly steamer travelled down below there.'

'Like that,' I say.

'I have often heard sounds that seemed to come out of the river, and the strangeness never passes,' he says. 'Once it was even terrible. It was long ago, and I was on a frontier where there was always trouble, the only Englishman for three hundred miles. One morning

very early the sentries woke me and said that they could hear firing. I went out and listened, but could hear nothing. Then the subadar, a worn veteran of many fights, suggested that we should go and listen at the river. So we went down all in the dark and laid down by the river and listened.'

'You cannot tell how strange it was. Out of the very water came the sounds of war. There was the bang of muskets that the wild tribes use, and in reply the crack of rifle-volleys. They were quite clear and loud. It seemed as if under the darkling river the devils were at grips, seeking to kill each other. One looked to see the flashes through the water. Yet it flowed peacefully, as if asleep.'

'What was it all?' I asked.

'Fourteen miles farther down a post of mine was being attacked. The river bore the news.'

For some reason that I do not know I very much dislike to hear him talk of his past life. I think, perhaps, that I am jealous of that life, because he lived before—before yesterday. I did not live. I can see now that what I thought was life was but existence. Life is love, and hate and fear, and hope and danger. Life is emotion, and my life is but begun. It has begun in him, with him, not as my life alone, but as a part of his. Therefore I cannot bear to think that he has lived before, has

fought and feared and hoped—perhaps has loved.

Cannot he put it all away and begin to-day in a new life that has no antecedents? a life with me alone? I do not know. I must think over it. Perhaps it is impossible, and I must make the best of it. Meanwhile I answer nothing, and he is silent.

And presently the steamer comes into view behind us. It approaches fast, driving the river up in a white crest before it and making two great waves on either side like wings that stretch in to the shore. It overtakes us, passing not far away. We can see the English passengers on the upper saloon-deck forward quite clearly. Two of them are our friends of yesterday, Captain Bruce and Mr. Dicker. They wave to us vigorously, and young Dicker has managed to possess himself of the captain's megaphone, which he holds to his mouth like a huge drinking-horn.

'Hurrah!' he calls out in a dreadful trumpet voice.

'Hurrah!' we wave back.

'Are you all quite comfy?' he demands.

We wave an acquiescence.

'Not quarrelled yet?'

We shake our heads.

'It would have been cooler on a submarine,' he roars; then adds: 'There's such a jolly row downstairs,' and chokes with laughter

that gurgles out of the megaphone like absurd thunder.

Just then the captain seizes him and deprives him of the megaphone and calls out :—

‘I say, Gallio!’

My husband waves.

‘There’s an old lady on our after deck swears that one of your servants, Po Ka, has eloped with her daughter.’

My husband jumps up, surprised.

‘I expect the girl’s aft there on your raft. The old lady intends to board you at Katha and reclaim her daughter. She’s furious—so look out.’

The steamer goes on out of earshot. I am horrified. But he? He, I am sorry to see, is back in his chair laughing. He is bursting with laughter, and the more reprovably I look at him the more he laughs.

That is just like a man; not one of them has any morals. I love him, yes. But he wants a great deal of reforming.

‘I think it is a very sad thing,’ I say. ‘Did you know she was on board?’

‘Certainly not,’ he answers.

‘Don’t you know anything about it?’

‘I know exactly what you do.’

‘But Po Ka is your servant. You must do something.’ I want to make him realise his responsibility and be serious.

‘Not at all,’ he answers.

I stare at him. 'What do you mean? Something must be done about it.'

'Certainly,' he answers calmly. 'You are mistress of this raft. It is you who are responsible. Such matters entirely appertain to the mistress's side of the combination.'

That is just hateful of him. He is trying to tease me.

'I haven't taken over yet,' I say with dignity. 'As you told me yesterday, I still only have privileges, not duties.'

'Well,' he answers, 'this is one of the privileges.'

I do not see myself where the privilege comes in. It seems to me a sad business, and very unpleasant to have happened. I am not accustomed to such cases, besides Po Ka is his servant. I tell him so.

'Oh,' he answers, 'I am not thinking so much of Po Ka. I am thinking of the girl and her mother. Evidently the girl wants to be with Po Ka; equally, evidently, the mother does not want her to be so. Where two women are at loggerheads, only a woman can intervene with success. It is purely your business, Lesbia. Why, they would scratch my eyes out between them.'

'I believe,' I say scathingly, 'that you are afraid.'

'You believe just about right,' he replies, chuckling to himself.

‘I thought men never admitted to be afraid of anything,’ I say.

‘You have queer ideas of men, my dear,’ he answers, opening his eyes. ‘Wild tribes, insurrections, dangers by flood and field, leopards and wild cats, I, like most men, am ready to face in due season. But earthquakes, volcanoes, and a woman deprived either of her daughter or her lover, I am not ashamed to be afraid of. They aren’t my line.’

‘And they are mine?’

‘Are they not, *Lesbia mia*?’ he says coaxingly. ‘Have you not the woman’s sympathy, the woman’s understanding, and the woman’s tact? Think of that poor child there—she is, I expect, only a young girl—behind us on the raft, torn between her mother and her husband. Who should not help her but you?’

His altered tone affects me. He shows real sympathy, and all his mirth is gone. It seems quite different as he now puts it.

‘Then they *are* married?’ I ask doubtfully.

For a moment I seem to see a gleam in his eye as of his sarcasm back again. Then he answers.

‘Naturally.’

I feel very much relieved. There is then no real impropriety, though it is sad she should have married without her mother’s consent.

‘I did not know it was natural to get married

before you ran away with a girl,' I say. 'I feared it was the other way. But it makes things much easier. What shall I do?'

'Wait here,' he says. 'I will go aft and see Po Ka and Po Chon, and hear their side. Then I will send the girl to you in the salon and you can talk to her.'

'But who will interpret?'

'Your ayah can interpret.'

'Won't you come too?' I ask. I would rather he be present. It is so strange to me yet. Only yesterday I was a girl, and all things were kept from me. Now I am supposed to help to regulate the world. 'Won't you be present too?'

He shakes his head. 'She would not talk if I were present as she will to you. If things are to be put straight, you must find out not only the mere facts but the things that lie beneath. You must estimate the forces we have to deal with.'

I looked at him in surprise. 'What forces?'

'My dear,' he answers, 'what forces move the world? There is but one—love and its shadow, hate. Does she love Po Ka most, or does she love her mother? Which is the greater love? Does Po Ka love her? He is, I know, capable of very sincere and perfect love. Sometime I will tell you the story. Has this girl won it? What sort of a girl is she? Could she keep it?'

'But,' I say, 'if they are *married*, it is too late to think of all that.'

He smiles. 'Never mind that now. Will you do that? You must do it now, for by dark we shall be at Katha, and the mother be on board.'

I do not want to. Oh I do not want to. Yet I must. I say 'I will.'

He goes back to the salon and I am left alone. I have not been alone, not since—so long ago.

'So there were *two* of us last night.'

After half an hour he comes back. He looks serious.

'Lesbia,' he says, as he sits down, 'I am afraid that we shall have trouble, all of us.'

'Tell me about it.'

'Let me tell you first about Po Ka. He has been with me as you know about twelve years. When I first took him he was only nineteen, such a nice boy, and with a charming little wife he had married not long before.'

'Married already?' I ask.

'Sometimes they marry early,' he replies. 'Po Ka and his wife were quite devoted to each other. They lived just for each other. Yet he was a good servant too. Well, about six months later I went on tour. I knew

that Po Ka's wife expected soon to have a baby, and I thought the elder brother would come out with me. I always left it to them to decide who came. But no, it was Po Ka who came. We made three marches into the district, and then I camped some thirty-five miles from headquarters. Four or five days later, in the evening, a messenger came to Po Ka to tell him his wife was very ill. He came to me in great distress and I let him go at once. He walked that five-and-thirty miles during the night and came at dawn near to his home. He met the boys leading the cattle out, and one told him that his wife was dead. He sat down where he was, quite dazed. Villagers found him and took him to his brother Po Chon, who cared for him. For the best part of a year he was distraught. He used to sit beside his brother's house and stare all day into the distance, vacant and senseless. If I spoke to him, he did not answer. Then he recovered slowly. Such is Po Ka.'

'I think that he can love,' I say.

'Now he has fallen in love again. The girl is pretty, and Po Chon tells me that she adores Po Ka. But she is the only child of her mother, who is a widow, and her mother would not give her to Po Ka because Po Ka follows me and the daughter would be lost to her. So the girl ran away and hid herself

in the servants' quarters yesterday before we started. And she was only discovered just before sunset.'

'They should have told you then,' I say. 'They should have brought her to you. They are not married properly.'

He smiles and strokes my hand. 'Sweet-heart,' he answers, 'that is the sort of answer you might have given yesterday. To-day, surely, you know more than that. Is there a man in all the world who would give up a girl who came to him like that? For all men's honour, I hope not one. And as for marriage—' and he looks at me.

It makes me hot and cold, but yes, I understand. For I have seen a little way into men's hearts and women's, into my own. I only press his hand in answer.

'She waits in the salon for you,' he says. 'Lesbia, be kind, be kind.'

I raise my eyes in mute reproach to his. I know, I *know*. Then I rise up and go inside. After the flood of light outside, I hardly see at first, it is so dark within.

Then slowly out of the gloom a figure gathers form, a girl's slight figure, with a girl's round face. Her great black eyes are full of tears and when she looks at me I see she is afraid.

Afraid of me!

Despite our different nationality, our

different civilisation, I feel to her as I have never felt to any woman before, as I could not have felt even yesterday. We both have entered into that universal womanhood that makes us one.

CHAPTER VII

‘ What is nobler than a woman if she have purity ? ’
‘ Purity is spotlessness of mind ; all else is noise.’
‘ To her that is pure all that God has ordained for the
progress of the world is pure.’ *Kural.*

VII



O Lesbia went in to see the runaway and I sat down and waited. I heard their voices coming through the wall, Lesbia's, the ayah's interpreting, the girl's. What did they say each to the other, the one a product of a civilisation made up of catchwords and dead prejudices, a civilisation that has passed its zenith, a girl laid over thick with artificialities, hardly conscious yet of the real woman below ; the other born and brought up in the simple freedom of the village, half-civilised, for whom culture and art and education did not exist ; therefore with clearer eyes maybe to see the verities of life ; the East and West—what did they say ?

It seemed to me an age since yesterday. Was it only yesterday I married with a light heart, anticipating only pleasure and happiness. The pleasure and happiness was come indeed full measure, but with them many other things. Marriage seemed easy, simple. In the old

novels all the trouble comes before marriage. When they are married 'they live happily ever after.' Such is the fiction. Fact told me it was not so. I found marriage complex, full of unknown, undreamt-of dangers and difficulties for us both.

We loved each other, true, but that love, that strong attraction of sex unto sex, which draws a man and woman first together, quite despite themselves, is nature's way, her sure and certain way, of getting intelligent children for her future. Emotion, which is intelligence, in children is born of a mutual strong emotion in the parents. Nature selects in her own way for her own purpose.

She cares for nothing in comparison with that. Husband and wife may rise from sexual love to spiritual love which is understanding, may live in sympathy or misery, it is nothing at all to her. Happiness in marriage is not given by nature, who lays but the foundation ; it must be built up by the man and woman, by mutual constant effort at understanding. Theirs is the fault, not nature's, if they cannot live together in mutual happiness.

I knew this all in theory long ago. I deemed the practice would be simple. I thought that yesterday. To-day, though one great danger had been passed, I saw innumerable rocks ahead already. How should one steer ?

The basket with the puppies was in a corner of the verandah. There Lady lay on guard, that no one except those she approved came near them. Myself, Po Chon, Po Ka—these were the favoured few. Lesbia was still regarded with strong doubt and everybody else was growled at.

The father Spot was entirely forbid the nursery. If he but approached to say 'Good-morning,' bristles went up and teeth were shown. Poor Spot, a milder-mannered father never lived, but he was not allowed even to see his family.

Lady stood up and yawned. She stretched herself, wanted some exercise, a change, wondered if Po Ka forgave her for her attitude of yesterday. She looked about. Everything seemed quite calm. She thought that she would take a stroll down to the end of the raft.

First she came over to me and wagged her tail and looked up questioningly. 'Will you look after the family while I'm away?' she asked.

I nodded. She licked my hand and trotted off.

Presently Spot appeared. He came into the verandah, noticed that Lady was not there, and thought the opportunity good to see this vaunted family. So he went over to the basket and peered in. He cocked his ears and wrinkled up his face in consideration. Two boys, two girls. Were the boys like him? Had they his fighting instinct? Would they

be a credit to him when he took their education in hand? Perhaps he could tell better by the smell, so he leant over and sniffed at them one after the other—then with a startled yap he fled. For Lady had returned suddenly and rushed upon him in a perfect hurricane of rage at his invasion of the sacred place.

She was much agitated. 'What has your father been doing to you?' she whined, as she turned them all over and examined them from stem to stern. 'Has he frightened you, my babes? has he bitten you?' Then realising slowly that no harm was done, her heat subsided and repentance came. Why had she lost her temper? Why had she rushed and snarled and snapped at him? Wasn't he their father after all, and a fond, indulgent father too? Yes she had been hasty. She glanced up to the bows where Spot sat in silent dignity. His fat round back was stiff with a mute reproach, with wounded dignity. She repented freely and fully. She ran up to the bows. Spot heard, for his ears went up, but he took no notice. Then she set herself to calm the storm. With her white teeth she combed that fat indignant back. With ardent solicitude she smoothed away its stiffness and dissolved its anger. Visibly Spot unbent, and a minute later they sat leaning against each other, in friendliest companionship. That was a happy marriage, Spot and Lady. He

championed her abroad, protecting her from village dogs and other dangers, and in so doing had reaped full many a scar and nearly met his death. She petted him at home. They quarrelled often, both being hot-tempered, but the quarrels never lasted long. One or the other repented and apologised, and the apology was always accepted in the frankest spirit. That is the secret of a happy marriage.

‘Does the Thakin want tea?’

It was Po Chon, his forehead wrinkled with anxiety.

‘They are within.’ I answered his unspoken question. ‘I don’t know what they are saying.’

He stared out into the distance. ‘It is women who bring all the trouble,’ he said.

‘And all the pleasure.’

‘Yes,’ he assented. ‘I don’t know which is the most.’

‘You cannot separate them,’ I replied. ‘They go together and make life.’

He nodded. That philosophy appealed to him, in fact was of his people.

‘Po Chon,’ I said, ‘how long have we been together?’

He counted in his mind. ‘Fourteen years.’

‘It is a long time,’ I answered. ‘And though we quarrel now and then we always make it up.’

‘I have an affection for the Thakin,’ he said.

‘And I for both of you,’ I answered ; ‘and yesterday I never supposed but that we should be together till I retired. Now to-day I have my doubts.’

He looked at me comprehendingly and nodded. It did not need any words to tell him why.

‘Directly the Thakin told me he would be married I feared. A Thakinma wishes to be the director of the household.’

‘Is it not her right?’

‘It is her right, but it will be hard for us and for the Thakin.’

‘And for her too.’

‘Why for the Thakinma?’

‘For her, because you, Po Chon and Po Ka, have always counted me first. You will always count me first, but that she will find hard to bear. It will be hard for you, because it is very hard for a man to serve a woman. Women are hard. They have not consideration, as a man has. They want their exact service. There is never any give and take about women. They always deal in the absolute. It will be hard for me, because to see difficulties in my household I cannot mend, to run the risk of your leaving me will be hard.’

‘We will do what we can,’ he said.

‘I am sure you will, and let us hope for the best. Do not come to me for orders openly, go to her. Do not bring tea without her

orders. Treat her as mistress. If you want to come to me, come secretly, when she does not know.'

He nodded.

'And tell Po Ka.'

'Yes, I will tell Po Ka. And now the Thakin's tea-time is past, and I know he wants his tea. May I not bring it?'

I shook my head. 'Not till she rings.'

'And about Po Ka and the girl?'

'I will tell you later. We will not reach Katha till six.'

He went away.

And within the salon the talk went on. Two women were trying to understand each other—through a third.

There was the rustle of a dress and Lesbia came out. I looked at her and smiled. Her countenance was troubled and her cheeks were pale.

'My dear,' I said, 'you want your tea.'

'Have you had yours?'

'And did you order it?'

She looked surprised. 'You don't want me to order tea for you.'

'I do. You are the mistress. If you don't give me tea, how can I get it?'

She stared, and then a sudden flush came over her. 'You are a goose,' she said, ruffling my hair. 'Ring the gong.'

I rung. When Po Chon came, he looked at her, not me. 'What is the word?' she asked me.

'He knows English enough for that,' I answered.

'Bring tea,' she said.

He went away and presently returned with tea.

Not till the tea was finished did I ask :

'Well, did she tell you?'

Lesbia frowned. 'She told me, but I am not sure I understood.'

'What didn't you understand?'

She thought a moment.

'You said that they were married?'

'Well?'

'I asked her if they had gone through any ceremony of marriage, and she said No.'

'Marriage,' I answered, 'is not a ceremony, but a fact.'

'Out here, perhaps, where everything is rude and rough.'

'Everywhere in the world,' I answered.

'The ceremony is but a form preliminary to a fact. In itself it is nothing.'

'Nothing?' She stared.

'Nothing,' I answered. 'It is an attempt of churches to impose their yoke on people. Do you suppose no one was ever married in Europe till three hundred years ago, when the churches first invented their ceremony? Do

you suppose now it has any real value? Suppose you and I had separated yesterday, would we have been husband and wife?’

‘In law,’ she urged.

‘Law, where it does not cover a fact, is the worst of fictions. But not even in foolish law would we have been completely married. Marriage is a fact, and these people lay more stress on fact than fiction. It is a fact that Po Ka and the girl are married. Do you doubt it?’

She shook her head and blushed.

‘I did not understand,’ she murmured.

‘Lesbia,’ I said, ‘try to look upon the facts of life, to understand its truth. Marriage between a man and a woman is a fact and a continuing relationship. He took her as his wife and she him as husband; they are one flesh. That is a truth all the world over. Love, which is God, has joined them. Ceremonies and laws which deny a truth are wicked and harmful. They may be useful as the outer sign of an inward truth, they are never true in themselves; when they deny a truth they are themselves a falsehood. In fact Po Ka and the girl are married. In law out here, among these people, they are also married except for one detail. The girl is under eighteen, and her mother’s leave was not obtained. Therefore her mother can claim back the girl if she like. Otherwise, the marriage is valid.’

‘How can she claim her back?’ said Lesbia. ‘Isn’t she ruined now? Would any one speak to her after what has happened if she went back?’

‘My dear,’ I answered, ‘these people are not Pharisees. They are not whited sepulchres, but human beings. They would deplore the accident, but they know human nature. They would not cast stones. They do not judge, they comprehend.’

‘They would accept her as before?’

‘Not quite, for she has had an accident. But accidents are not sins; they would not blame her, but be sorry for her.’

‘And would another marry her?’

‘If he was sure she had forgotten Po Ka, and loved him. Why should he not?’

Lesbia sat stunned.

‘Marriage is a vow made before God,’ she murmured reverently.

‘Priests are not God,’ I answered, ‘although they try to make you think so. Neither does God live in a church.’

‘Where does He live?’

‘The Kingdom of Heaven,’ I answered, ‘is within you.’

She shook her head. ‘I do not understand.’

‘The God that makes us one is Love, Lesbia,’ I cried, ‘and the God to whom you make promises is your conscience. Don’t you see and know that God lives *in* the world, in you, in

me, in everything? The world is all the garment of God. He does not live without. He has no priests. He Himself lives in us if we would only see Him.'

She put her face down between her hands. So she sat silently, and then she rose and went in to her bedroom. Poor child! she was bewildered, *bouleversée*. I wondered had I done right to open her eyes so quickly. I did not follow. I know that there are times when solitude is the only help, to be alone and still, to lie and listen till the inward voice is heard.

The raft went on. The evening shadows came upon the hills. And we drew near our halting-place.

Below that farther point there lay the station of Katha and the mother waiting for the girl.

The raft moved on, and Lesbia did not come.

The point was rounded and we saw the buildings of the station, the village clustered just below, the steamer at her flat. I rang the gong. And to Po Chon I gave this order.

'Po Chon, when we come to anchor and the mother comes, give the girl to her. But say that at ten o'clock to-night they must come back, she and the girl, and we will talk the matter out. Do you understand?'

He understood.

‘What will be done?’ he asked.

‘I do not know.’

‘Po Ka is in despair and the girl also. They sit and hold each other’s hands.

‘And the girl’s mother is crying there upon the shore. I see her. Well, we must see what is the best. Meanwhile, do as I say.’

He went away, and the crew began to row the raft in to the shore.

CHAPTER VIII

‘A woman in ten thousand have I not found.’

Ecclesiastes.

VIII

HIP, hip, hurrah! Hip, hip, hurrah!' That is what I hear from the bank. Some one is cheering us. And as soon as we are moored, I hear them come on board and greet my husband. There is a great talking on the forward deck, and then he comes to me.

'May I come in?' he asks.

'Come in,' I say. I am lying on my bed trying to arrange my ideas, which seem in chaos, all the new ones fighting with the old ones, till I don't know where I stand.

He comes in beside me.

'Tired, my dear?' he asks.

'No,' I say doubtfully. 'Not tired exactly, but confused.'

'Well, you must get up and have a run ashore to clear your little head'; and he strokes my hair. 'All the men have come down to meet us, five of them, and want us to drive round the station first, then go to the club and then dine with them.'

'Oh dear,' I say, sitting up, 'must we go?'

For indeed, indeed I don't want to go. I want to keep quiet, to hide for a time yet. I can't face a lot of men, all of whom know we were married yesterday. If there was a woman, I would not so much mind, as she would stand by me, but there is none here I know. And men are dreadful, with what they call their humour, which is quite nice at the right time, but at the wrong—

He looks at me and laughs. 'Cheer up,' he says. 'They are excellent fellows, all of them, and will do you no harm. Why that set face? We are not going to storm a battery or do any desperate deed. Probably we shall survive it, *Lesbia mia*.'

He knows quite well. I see it in his face, and he is mocking me. I could bite him. Have men no sensitiveness in their coarse natures?

'What is the matter?' he whispers in my ear.

'Oh never mind,' I say hastily. 'I have got to dress. Can your friends wait?'

'Certainly they can!' he says, 'but hurry up,' and goes away.

When I am ready, I go to the door and pause. I hear them talking, laughing, and joking outside the salon. How can I face them? I did not know before how brave a

girl must be to get married. I feel as if I would sooner sink through the raft than go on. But the raft holds firm beneath my feet. It is my knees that tremble. With a great effort, I open the door and go out.

Immediately a tall, handsome man comes forward, shakes hands, and makes a little speech.

‘We have no English lady here,’ he says, ‘and have not seen one for nearly a year. We never saw a bride here before, and Gallio is an old friend of ours. So for all these reasons your visit is an event to us.’

I bow and smile, and he continues :

‘We want you to drive with us to the club and afterwards dine with us, if you will do us such a favour.’

I say that I shall be very glad, and indeed there is a kindness about him that takes my fear away. Then the other men are introduced.

‘The club is a mile away,’ he says, ‘but I have brought my dogcart, and will drive you up if you will let me. Gallio, there’s a pony here for you.’

We go ashore, and I get into the little dogcart with Mr. Tournon. My husband rides with the other men, who make a sort of guard of honour. Two ride in front to clear the road for us, and the others ride behind. The road is narrow, is metalled only in the centre, and is about a mile long. It is, however, the

only metalled road in a district of six thousand square miles, Mr. Tournon tells me.

Our drive lies through the village and into the civil station, and I enjoy it quite well except when we have to stop occasionally for a bullock-cart to get out of the way. Then the pony takes the opportunity to do ballet dancing on his hind legs, which I don't like.

'You have no Englishwomen here,' I ask.

He shakes his head.

'But why?'

'Unhealthy,' he says briefly. 'It used to be called "the white man's grave." We have a cemetery here full of the graves of officers. 'It's rather better now, but still—unhealthy.'

'But,' I say, 'aren't you married?'

He glances at me sideways. 'I suppose Gallio told you.'

I shake my head. 'I guessed.'

'How did you guess?' His tone is cold.

'You have a manner,' I answer vaguely, for indeed I cannot formulate myself why I had guessed. 'There is a difference.'

'Yes,' he says briefly.

He says no more; he does not speak about his wife. He is silent with that silence which is eloquent of things unsaid, that never can be said. I feel uncomfortable, and am glad when we arrive at the club.

It is just a little thatched building with two

rooms, and a card- and reading-room. It is decorated with flowers, evidently in our honour.

‘I see that you are not dressed for lawn-tennis. I do not know if you care for cards,’ says Mr. Tournon. ‘Perhaps you would rather sit and watch them playing lawn-tennis.’

My husband and three other men begin a game. Mr. Tournon excuses himself for a few minutes, and I am left with young Mr. Logan to sit and watch the game.

‘Have you been here long?’ I ask.

‘Two years,’ he answers.

‘And the others?’

‘As long or longer.’

‘Are you not tired of it?’

‘No. We are a happy party here.’

‘Do not you quarrel?’

He laughs. ‘No; or if we do, we suppress it. Men learn not to quarrel, you know.’

How do they learn, I wonder. If five women were shut up alone for two years together, without men, would any of them be alive, let alone on speaking terms with the others at the end, I wonder?

‘When do you learn, and how?’ I ask.

He looks at me and grins. ‘At school, in a regiment, or office, in work, in play, in the club, in life. That is the when. As to the how, common sense and the stick, if necessary, does it.’

‘Perhaps,’ I think, ‘that is why women

never learn. But perhaps they aren't meant to learn; men are the cement of life, and women the separating force.'

And again, say that five women, or fifty women, were secluded from all men of their kind and class, how terribly narrow they would find life. They would become atrophied. Yet these men here alone are not narrow. The great currents of the world affect them and move them, and they are conscious of a community with the world life. But we, we alone have no such community. The world forces reach us through our men—our fathers, brothers, husbands, above all husbands—are broken for us by them, are softened and adapted. A man touches life direct, but a woman touches life through man, who is her medium, her glove, her conductor.

So do new thoughts run through and through me, born of a new emotion, of a tremble and a movement of my whole self that was not there but yesterday.

There is a longing come to me to touch this world, and there is a new sense of community with it, through him, through him who is part of me.

'You have not told me what you are,' I say to Mr. Logan.

'I am the engineer,' he says, 'but what do you know of things like that? That is a man's question.'

‘Nothing,’ I answer. ‘I don’t know why I asked. You are not married?’

It seems to me just now that the one question of importance in the world is marriage. I did not know before what a tremendous thing it was. And now that I know, it takes the first place in my mind.

He laughs and shakes his head. ‘No, no, and I do not think I ever shall be.’

‘Why not?’ I ask, surprised and hurt. It seemed from his tone as if he despised the marriage state.

‘I can’t afford it, never shall be able to afford it—like many other men out here,’ he answers.

I think of all the heaps of girls at home so wanting husbands and am vexed. ‘That is selfishness,’ I say.

‘Perhaps,’ he answers. ‘But all marriages are not happy.’

‘Are none of you married except Mr. Tournon?’

He shakes his head.

‘Why is not Mrs. Tournon here? If she were, and you saw how happy a woman can make herself even in a place like this, and what a difference she effects, you would all get married.’

He stares at me open-mouthed. Then suddenly he bursts into a loud guffaw, which he tries to stifle ineffectually, and finally gets up and runs away.

‘What have I said?’ I feel hot all over. Has Mrs. Tournon bolted or what? My husband ought to have told me. I sit and tremble with anger, and would like to cry. I watch them mechanically as they drive the ball backwards and forwards.

At last Mr. Tournon comes. ‘What, all alone?’ he says, surprised. ‘I am very sorry. I told Logan to look after you.’

I do not know what to say, and presently the game is over and the players come up. It is getting too dark to play another set, and we go up to the club-house.

There we sit for a while and talk, and then we must drive back to the raft to dress for dinner. My husband drives me.

‘Why didn’t you tell me about Mr. Tournon?’ I say indignantly as we go along.

‘Tell you what?’ he asks.

‘About Mrs. Tournon. What is the mystery?’

For a minute he is silent. ‘I’m sorry you found out,’ he says at last. ‘I did not want you to know, at least at present. She is a devil.’

‘I suppose she has run away with some one else.’

He shakes his head and smiles a little grimly. ‘The trouble is the other way,’ he says.

‘I do not understand,’ I say. ‘I thought that all trouble in marriage came from that.’

He shakes his head.

'It is an unpleasant story,' is all he answers.

But that does not satisfy me. I want to know—indeed I want to know—about this new world into which I've come. Until now I could know nothing. I was always told 'it is not for girls to know such things.' Now I am enfranchised and I may know, and he must tell me, because now it is my world too—through him. But I keep silence till we arrive and are 'at home.' Then as we are dressing, I say to him :

'Please tell me. Have I not a right to know—now?'

He looks at me in puzzled fashion. 'I am not sure,' he says, 'how much I ought to tell you. Is it not enough that in this unit, which is We, one of us knows?'

I shake my head quite vigorously. 'I suppose it is very improper?' I say.

He comes over to my side of the room and sits beside me. 'The story is a long one, even as I know it, and of course I do not know it all,' he says. 'But it is like this. Tournon is an able man, but like many very able men he is very simple about women. He cannot see, he takes your sex on trust. He married—as all of us marry, by some fate that makes us. That fate was not kind to him. He took for granted that the woman he married would be to him as good wives are to husbands. Of course, I only know

what the world knows. The secrets of that marriage are secrets. But there was trouble from the very day of marriage. She called herself a new woman, vaunted her independence, scoffed at the idea of a wife obeying her husband in any matter.'

'And why should she?' I ask.

'My dear,' he answers, 'we are none of us free. Men are in obedience to their government, to the laws, to the rules of business, to the unwritten yet most stringently enforced codes of give-and-take among men. Women know nothing of this. Women touch the world of action not directly but through their husbands, who are responsible for them, who act for them and protect them. If in such matters they will not obey their husbands, they become either servants to some other man or simply anarchists. And the husband has to take the responsibility before the world, because the world cannot deal with women direct, but only through their men.'

'Was Mrs. Tournon anarchist?'

'As far as Tournon was concerned, always. She evidently deemed it a point of honour never to listen to him.'

'Yet she had married him.'

'She knew nothing of the world, nothing of what marriage meant, and she would not learn. She thought she knew everything, yet knew nothing. She could learn nothing, for

all sympathy, which is understanding, is born of emotion, which she could not feel. She was a woman incapable of real love. She was a "pure, good woman" in the cant of a canting world, pure in her body because almost emotionless, impure beyond conception in her mind because she lacked that sympathy and understanding that the love emotion alone can give. She thought and said that the world was evil. She went about the world holding her spiritual nose to keep out evil savours.'

I look up in his face and smile.

'So she made Tournon's life a hell; she cared nothing for what he said, interfered in matters she knew nothing of, sought advice when she thought she needed it from any one but her husband. She was intolerable. All his friends dropped him. Stations to which she came broke out into discord, and government work cannot go on where there is discord. He was transferred and again transferred because of her. Finally, he secretly asked to be sent here, where women may not come, to be free of her.'

'Cannot he separate?'

'How can he separate? The Church-made laws of divorce recognise only excess or error in love; the utter want of capacity for love, for real marriage, is not to them a fault. For they have never tried to understand what

love and marriage is. Yet of the abounding misery of the world nine-tenths is due to want of love, and not a tenth to excess of it.'

'What will he do?'

'Who knows? He is a ruined man for life, and nothing can help him. He will stay here as long as he can. He is fairly at peace here. If he leave to go on furlough, she will rejoin him. She is the "perfect wife" in her own estimation.'

'He might love and take another woman,' I suggest timidly, 'and so make his wife divorce him.'

'He would not do it,' he answers. 'Not because of himself nor because he thought it a sin, but because of that other woman whom the world would damn. He could not live with a woman he did not love; he could not bear to see a woman he loved cold shouldered by the world. Besides, once bit, twice shy.'

The bitterness of his voice hurts me, and I cry, 'And what of her? of Mrs. Tournon? Do you never think of her, how steeped in misery she must be. Men have so many things, but marriage is a woman's only chance. And if it fail?'

'It is her own fault,' he says.

'No,' I say. 'Not her own. It is the way she has been brought up and taught.'

He looks at me and strokes my cheek. 'My dear, my dear,' he says, 'of course you

are right. She suffers, and through her the husband, for sins of churches, conventions, laws, societies, and foolish mothers. She is to be pitied as much as he is. Only you see, the evil comes through her, therefore she seems the one to blame.'

'Poor woman,' I say, 'poor woman.' I feel that I should like to cry.

He only pats my cheek and says, 'Come, hurry up, or we shall keep them waiting.'

We change, and then we drive to Mr. Tournon's house for dinner.

It is a very pleasant dinner. How nice men can be to a woman when she is young and pretty. They toast me and drink my health. Afterwards they sing songs, and I sing too.

But above all, the feeling that I have for them is pity. Men can do many things ; one thing they cannot do is make a home. Yet they want a home. After their work, their trouble, and the dangers they go through, they want a home where they can rest and can be petted. They also need to learn, I think, that there is a side of life that with all their knowledge they know nothing of, a world where, with all their masterfulness, they must give way.

As I look at them, I see such a number of things that want amending. Their shirts are not properly starched nor their ties well tied. That comes of the want of the influence of women. One man confided in me that he

had not worn his evening clothes for two years till to-night, and that when he put on his silk socks he found his boy had mended them with white cotton thread. What their bungalows must be like, I fear to think. Men have no ideas of cleanliness except in themselves.

I feel so sorry for these homeless men, so nice, so half-civilised as it were. I would like to mother all of them.

I tell this to my husband and he answers: 'A woman's first idea when she sees a man she at all likes is to assert her authority over him, to get him down, to say innumerable "don'ts" to him.'

'You need it so badly,' I retort.

'It is your thirst for power,' he answers.

And when I think over the matter candidly I see that maybe it is a little of both.

As we drive up to the raft, we see a small, white blur upon the road. As we arrive, the blur dissolves into two little dogs, who jump and fawn upon their master with yaps and cries. It is Spot and Lady.

'They are faithful little things,' he says as he caresses them. 'When I go out, they always wait for me upon the road. They would wait all night, or many days and nights.'

They also deign to take some notice of me, acknowledging me at last as belonging to the family, and we all go on board together.

And now for our romance.

CHAPTER IX

‘ But mother’s love, like mother’s milk, may sour.’

GANGLER.

IX



WE went into the salon and sat down. Filled with clear yellow light, it seemed a cheerful little place, and Lesbia's presence gave it a grace and sweetness that were new to me.

Presently they came in, the girl and mother first, blinking at the bright light, nervous, afraid of these sea strangers whom they did not know. They passed to Lesbia's side and sat upon the mats.

Then followed Po Chon and Po Ka, who came and sat near me. Po Ka's eyes were fixed upon the girl, but hers upon the floor.

There was a brief silence while we looked from one to other. For here within these narrow walls, made manifest in these poor people, were the great passions of the world, that made it and that keep it. First, there was the mother of the girl, maternal love, the preserver of the world that bears and nourishes and cherishes. She was a woman,

old beyond her years, worn with hard work, stupid and almost ugly. Of her looks and dress she was quite careless, for to her lovers came no more. Her eyes as she looked on her daughter were filled with love, but not a high nor noble love. It was a selfish, jealous passion that they showed, almost a hate sometimes. It was a love of the girl for her own sake, not for the girl's, a love that would sacrifice the daughter to the mother, that looked back and never forward. It was a mother's love grown old and out of place, from an unselfishness become a selfishness, from a preserving passion grown into a destroying passion—one that would blindly ruin its child's future if it could. It was the degradation of a once truth that would not recognise its present falsehood.

The girl was pretty. She had round cheeks, bright eyes, a soft and yielding form. There was in her that grace of looks that lifts a girl for a few years far up above her parents. She has a 'possibility,' and they have none. She is a promise, though it never be fulfilled; she has the nobility of a rising flame, the mother is a dying ember.

'Well?' I said.

The mother looked at me angrily, and then caught hold of the girl's hand, as if to hold her from me. But she answered nothing.

'What is the matter?' I asked. 'Po Ka

loves your daughter and she loves him. Why cannot you give her to him ?'

'He is a robber and a deceiver,' she muttered. 'Never will I give my girl to him ?'

'What has he robbed ?'

'Hasn't he robbed me of her ? Didn't he come like a thief and make love to her and steal her heart away ?' The mother's voice was hard and bitter.

'So do all men,' I answered. 'Did not your husband once steal your heart and you ?'

She glances at me sidewise.

'And wasn't he right ? For indeed he didn't steal, you gave. Is that not so ? Look back.'

'My parents gave their consent,' she grumbled.

'And you can give yours.'

'My husband did not take me away from them to a far country. He came and lived with us.'

'Ah,' I said to Lesbia, and I translated ; 'that is the trouble.'

'And isn't it natural,' said Lesbia, 'to want to keep her daughter and gain a son ?'

'Love thinks not of such things,' I answered ; 'and love is lord, for he commands the future. We can but obey, or else deny. What of your mother, Lesbia ?'

'Poor mother,' and Lesbia's eyes grew soft.

‘She let you come when I called.’

‘Poor mother.’

‘“Poor mother” maybe; but “poorer children” if their mothers will not let them go.’

‘It is the world’s tragedy,’ she said.

‘It is through the tears of men and women that the world moves on,’ I answered.

‘You are so hard,’ she said, ‘on women.’

‘Then do you speak,’ I said. ‘I will interpret. You are a woman; speak to this woman.’

She flushed. But Lesbia is brave and Lesbia has sense. She spoke through me. I said:

‘Look at this lady.’

The mother raised her eyes and stared at Lesbia. She had never seen an Englishwoman before. I saw her eyes grow larger and a look of wonder come into her face.

‘She bids me talk to you,’ I said. ‘She bids me say she has a mother too, far, far away beyond the sunset. Yet her mother gave her to me.’

The woman stared. ‘Her mother has a husband.’

‘No; she is a widow as you are.’

‘But she has other children.’

‘No. She is alone.’

‘Then how could she do it? How?’ she cried. ‘I cannot part with my daughter.’

‘The lady bids me say that her mother too wept when she went; but that her mother would not sacrifice her daughter to herself.’

'I don't,' the woman cried. 'But the lady's mother loved and trusted you. I don't trust Po Ka.'

'Why not.'

'He is stranger.'

'To you, but not to me. He has been with me for fourteen years. I know him. Will you believe me what I tell you of him?'

She looked incredulously at me.

'I will tell you a tale about him,' I continued; and I told her of his first wife. 'So he can love,' I said.

'First love,' she said.

'He who has loved can love again,' I answered. 'Some cannot love at all.'

'How do I know he loves my daughter?'

'Look at him.'

She looked across angrily at Po Ka. 'How can I tell by looking?' she complained. 'Men are all liars.'

'I think not,' I said. 'And your daughter loves Po Ka.'

'No, no,' she cried.

'Ask her.'

She saw the danger. 'I will not ask her. She is bewitched and will not answer true.'

'Yes, love is witchery, is it not?'

'Oh! oh!' she cried with anger, 'you are all against me. But I will not let her go.'

When I first see the mother, my feelings are all against her. She is so common and so dowdy beside her daughter. She is like a witch claiming a beauty. But gradually as I watch her my feelings change ; I understand. It is her love that makes her so. Is she worn and old, it is by working for the girl ; is she badly clothed, it is to give her daughter a pretty dress ; is she narrow and stupid, it is because her soul is in the girl. Within her daughter is wrapped up her whole interests and her life ; she lives alone in her, that second self. And her pain is as of one who feels her heart torn from out her breast ; nothing is left her but despair and death.

It is the eternal tragedy of women that they give themselves utterly to their children, who give themselves elsewhere, and leave their mothers empty and purposeless until the end.

And yet, it must be so.

My husband talks. I listen, but do not understand. Therefore I watch—and I understand.

How did this understanding come to me ? But yesterday it was not there. I feel a-tingle with new nerves that see, that hear, that feel things that I dreamt not before.

How feels the mother ? I can guess, can feel. When I left my mother but a month ago, I did

not know her heart, nor what I cost her. Now I can understand a little what that mother feels. For I myself may be a mother soon.

And Po Ka? I have seen my husband tremble to look at me; I have felt the passion in his arms while his heart beat hard against my breast. I comprehend.

And the girl towards Po Ka? I know, I *know*.

There are no words to tell these things. You might just as well try to tell music, to express in words low symphonies, triumphal marches, or the misereres of the dead. But in a heart strung up, whose strings are tuned, they echo their own music.

And as they talk I seem to see before me rise visions of all the world, the innumerable mothers who have lost, must lose, their daughters, who have been their very lives, of men like robbers in the night, who steal girls' hearts, of girls who open wide their arms to let their hearts be rifled. Why are the glories of the world so near its tragedies? Death hangs upon the heels of life.

'What do they say?' I ask presently.

'I think we are getting at it,' says my husband. 'The real trouble partly is this, that the girl is not marrying at home but going away, perhaps for ever. That is a bitterness.'

'Truly,' I say.

'But even that is not the worst. I think

it's this. The mother is getting old. She is not very strong. She might break down, and in her daughter's absence starve.'

'Is that so?' I ask.

'She will not say, but I think that must be it. The daughter is her bank, in which her savings have all been placed. To lose her is ruin. Otherwise, I think that she would bear it; other mothers do.'

'What will you do?'

'Make her an offer.' He turns from me again and talks to them.

And as he talks I see all faces lighten. Po Ka's grows bright, Po Chon looks relieved, the girl gets radiant. And even the mother loses her despair and seems, though gloomy, acquiescent.

Then my husband goes into his room, comes out with money, which he gives to the mother. She counts it, puts it in her cloth, and they all get up and go.

'How is it settled?' I ask him.

'The girl goes with her mother to-night, but returns to Po Ka at dawn, when we start onward. The mother gives her consent, and the marriage is confirmed.'

'How did you manage it?' I asked.

'I found the difficulty, the real insuperable grievance in the mother's mind. The girl makes money, and the girl gone the mother would have difficulty in living.'

‘How sordid!’ I exclaim.

‘My dear,’ he says, ‘it is not sordid to complain if you lose half, perhaps later on all your livelihood. It is but natural, and what is natural is never sordid. The mother loves her daughter, do not doubt it, but like other mothers she would make herself bear that loss if necessary for the girl’s sake. But to be reduced to poverty as well as solitude—that were hard to bear, and would rankle in her mind always. Remember if the girl married a man in the same village they would help the mother all her life, but Po Ka takes the girl away.’

‘What did you do?’

‘I gave her a sum down and arranged to send her monthly a proportion of Po Ka’s pay.’

‘Oh, it is so material!’ I cry.

‘My dear, my dear,’ he says, and takes me in his arms, ‘is not the world flesh as well as spirit? Is it not spirit manifest in flesh? It is not sordid to be duly careful of the flesh, for the spirit lives in it.’

I do not understand, I only shake my head.

‘Sweetheart,’ he says, ‘your hair is sunshine and your eyes are heaven. They are material things. So is this kiss. Do you despise it therefore?’

I kiss him for my answer, and we go to bed.

CHAPTER X

‘Nature is the living visible garment of God.’

GOETHE.



ESBIA,' I said, 'get up.'

She half opened sleepy eyes and shook her head.

'Get up, get up,' I said, but she in answer closed her eyes again, and turned away from me in playful petulance.

'Strong measures,' I said severely, 'become necessary for lazy girls.'

Evidently, however, this lazy girl was not afraid of strong measures, for she only closed her eyes the tighter and hugged the pillow to her face. I thought I heard her murmur something.

'What did you say?' I asked.

No answer unless a tiny snore might be interpreted as such.

'Very well,' I said in as deep a tone as I could find, suppressing my laughter. 'Now comes the time for action!' I put my arms suddenly about her and lifted her into a sitting position, caught with one hand the wet sponge from the stand and rubbed her face.

The effect was electrical. From being a soft and yielding slip of fragrant flesh, she became as evasive and elastic as an eel. Pulling herself from me with a sudden twist she caught her pillow with both hands and rained upon me buffet after buffet. Taken by surprise I had no defence at first. I just sat and suffered. Then came a fearful struggle, with sobs and sighs, and the loud complaint of furniture. There were vicissitudes in that fight, but at length victory, as it always does, inclined towards the right. Though breathless and hot, I held her tight, disarmed and helpless; yet still triumphant and shaking with laughter.

'Lesbia,' I gasped, 'this is *most* unseemly.'

'I warned you,' she panted, shaking her hair from out her eyes. 'I warned you.'

'When did you warn me?' I demanded.

'I said "Gare à vous."''

'Oh, that was what you mumbled; I didn't hear.'

'I can't help that,' she answered.

'I wanted you to get up,' I said, explaining.

'And I didn't want. Am I not mistress of myself?'

I shook my head. 'Besides, my Lesbia, I have a plan.'

This aroused her interest. She moved round, seated herself on my knees, put her arm round my neck, and asked, 'What plan?' with curiosity.

‘That is my secret.’

‘I thought you said,’ she whispered, ‘that love lay in *telling* secrets?’

‘Therefore I must make secrets so that I can tell them you,’ I said. ‘I have a plan. Do as I say and you will know my plan.’

‘Is the plan nice?’

‘It’s lovely.’

‘What must I do?’

‘Put on your bathing dress, and over that a cloak, and come.’

‘Is that all?’

‘At present.’

She laughed. ‘It is soon done. Go outside and wait for me.’ I went out to the fore-castle.

Some ten years before I had built for me a boat for sailing on the river. She was eighteen feet in length, and not quite four feet in breadth, light, and yet strong. I had rigged her with a sprit-sail and a foresail, and I had sailed or rowed her for many a hundred miles upon the river.

She had accompanied us, moored aft, but that morning I had brought her up to the fore-castle, had put in her cushions and rugs, had provisioned her for the day, and now, gay with new paint, with sail shaking in the breeze and pennant streaming, she awaited us.

‘How nice she looks!’ said Lesbia, coming out.

'She is as good as she is pretty,' I replied. 'I never had an accident in her, and this river is called dangerous to sail in. Are you all ready?'

She nodded and stepped into the boat. I took my place beside her. Po Chon cast off the moorings and we were free.

'Where are we going?' she asked.

'Anywhere,' I answered, drawing in the sheet while the boat gathered way; 'the river and the day are ours. First we will sail away ahead into our solitude; then we will bathe; then we will do whatever you like.'

She clapped her hands.

The cool north breeze from the abode of snow came down the river crisping its ripples; our sails filled out. With a rustle and a lap the water slipped beside us. After the stillness and formlessness of the raft we seemed to have come on board a thing of life and beauty. We rushed fast down the river.

'What is her name?'

'*Deebo.*'

'What does that mean?'

'It is a water-insect, one that runs along the surface.'

'Yes, I know. Are you going to let me steer?'

'I had not thought of it. Do you know how?'

'No. You can show me.'

‘I think I’ll wait,’ I answered. ‘The breeze is fresh, and I want to get on. When we return, perhaps.’

She let her hand trail in the water, raised it and let the jewel-drops fall back again ; she laughed with all the abandon of a child.

‘Look out,’ I said, ‘for a nice place to bathe in.’

‘What sort of place?’

‘A piece of water out of the main current, with a sandy beach that we can land on.’

‘The sails,’ she said, ‘are in my way. I think I’ll go into the front.’

‘It is generally called the bows,’ I said. ‘All right, go up.’

She rose and stumbled up the boat till she came into the bows, then waved to me and sat down and leant over. The boat didn’t trim so well, but Lesbia didn’t care for that. She liked to be alone for a little while and watch and think.

For an hour we ran on. The raft was far behind, quite out of sight ; there were forests on each side. We were alone, as utterly alone as if we had stepped out of the present into the early ages of the world. Nature in all her virgin beauty was round us, and above the blue.

‘Oh, oh!’ she suddenly cried, and pointed. ‘What are these?’

They were a school of river-porpoises making their way to higher waters. They leapt

and gambolled as they passed. How all wild things love playing. The wavelets laugh, the fishes leap ; the flowers and leaves and grasses dance and sway and tremble in the breeze ; the birds soar up and drop, or chase each other through the woods in hide-and-seek.

Two otters passed, swimming and diving in their perfect poetry of motion.

Still we held on, until at last we came abreast a little bay below an island. The water was almost still and the sandy shore was smooth and golden. I steered into the bay and dropped the sails.

‘ Now,’ I said, ‘ come along. We ’ll dive from here and swim ashore.’

‘ But the boat ?’

‘ She ’ll be all right, she ’ll hardly drift. I will swim back again and get her.’

Lesbia dropped her cloak and stood up like a statue clear against the light. We dived together. There are few pleasures greater than to feel cool waters close round you, when the naiad holds you in her arms and kisses you all over. Then we struck out for the shore. Lesbia swam with vigour, springing to every thrust of her white legs. In the race she nearly beat me ; as it was we made a dead-heat.

‘ I like the diving best,’ she said. ‘ Let us swim back and climb into the boat and dive.’

So we swam back, but climbing into the boat was not so easy. When you catch hold

of the gunwale to pull you up it gives, and when you throw yourself upon it the edges hurt. At last after an effort I got in, and then I pulled in Lesbia. After that we dived alternately, one staying in the boat to help the diver back. I had no idea that Lesbia was so strong. As her arms closed about me to pull me up they were firm and hard beneath their tender skin; she felt like rubber gloved in white satin. Oh, how we laughed and dived and splashed.

At last we sat down exhausted, Lesbia on the seat, I on the gunwale, and dripped water.

‘Lesbia,’ I said presently in a satisfied tone, ‘I have solved one of my problems.’

‘What problem?’ she asked curiously.

‘One of those problems in natural history I told you of,’ I answered.

‘Which one?’

‘I told you I was anxious to know if the white on your shoulder blades came off. I have discovered it doesn’t,’ I said, gently rubbing her shining skin where the bathing-dress had left it to be admired.

She only sniffed.

‘It is a wonderful thing, the human skin,’ I said reflectively. ‘It fits so well, and yet is loose and comfortable. It is comfortable, isn’t it?’

‘Quite, thanks—when it is left alone.’

‘It is good protection against the weather, against the heat and cold. We should get on badly without it. It keeps out intruders.’

‘Not all,’ said Lesbia suggestively.

‘It is thinner in some places than others. I wonder why that is.’

No answer from Lesbia.

‘And it is ornamental. There are blue veins that cross it here and there; it is so white, yet when you pinch it a beautiful pink colour comes at once.’

I was so interested in my natural history studies that I forgot that the specimen might have feelings. But apparently she had, for she gave a sudden jump that entirely upset the balance of the boat. I wasn't prepared and I went in backwards, so that naturally I swallowed a great deal of water before I rose to the top again. Then I saw Lesbia looking over the boat and laughing till she choked.

‘Good-bye,’ I said with injured dignity. ‘You've thrown me over, so I am off. You can bring the boat ashore yourself.’ Then I struck out for land.

Lesbia is not a good boatwoman. When she tried to raise the sail in order to sail ashore, she only tangled herself up in the sheet to such an extent that I thought I should have to swim back and disentangle her. However, she got free. Then she tried to row, but using only one oar she made the *Deebo* turn round and round until the poor water-insect was so giddy it didn't know whether it was travelling upon its keel or its gunwale. How-

ever, eventually they drifted ashore, but when I approached Lesbia jumped out and fled. It was in vain. I pursued, and quickly I caught her, for I am a much faster runner than Lesbia.

‘ They sat them down upon the yellow sand
Between the sun and moon upon the shore,
And sweet it was to dream of Fatherland,
Of child and wife and slave ; but evermore
Most weary seemed the sea, weary the oar,
Weary the wandering fields of barren foam.
Then some one said, “ Our island home
Is far beyond the sea, we will no longer roam.” ’

Therefore we sought a place to rest in and have lunch. It was a beautiful place we found, a little dell wherein a stream came murmuring to the river. Trees and great creepers made a deep green gloom broken with flickering lights.

‘ Here are cool mosses deep,
And through the moss the ivies creep ;
And in the stream the long leaved flowers weep ;
And from the craggy ledge the poppy hangs in sleep.’

For we had come into

‘ a land
In which it seemed always afternoon.
All round the coast the languid air did swoon—
Breathing like one that hath a weary dream.
Full faced above the valley stood the moon,
And like a downward smoke the slender stream
Adown the cliff to fall and pause and fall did seem.’

In that nook we had entered into the intimacy of the woods. There were pigeons there, who flew from tree to tree, seen only when they moved, for when they rested their green

plumage blended with the leaves. There were imperial pigeons perched far up, whose moan passed through the forest. A jungle cock in all his war-paint, crimson and gold and black, ran out and looked at us and crowed. Like spurts of flame fire-finches darted past, and a blue chameleon stealthily walked round his tree and stared at us with great unwinking eyes.

So we had lunch. And afterwards we did not talk,

‘But propt on beds of amaranth and moly
 How sweet (while warm airs lull us blowing lowly),
 With half-dropt eyelid still
 Beneath a heaven dark and holy ;
 To watch the long, bright river drawing slowly
 His waters from the purple hill ;
 To hear the dewy echoes calling
 From cave to cave through the thick-twined vine ;
 To watch the emerald-coloured waters falling
 Through many a woven acanthus wreath divine.’

Had he been here before us, or is it we who have stepped into the land of fairy, where the poets live ?

‘Yes, that is it,’ low murmured Lesbia in my ear. ‘And you will tell me fairy tales to make me sleep.’

I took her in my arms ; she lay quite still and murmured in my ear :

‘How sweet it were ever to seem,
 Falling asleep in a half dream ;
 To dream and dream like yonder amber light,
 That will not leave the myrrh bush on the height,
 To hear each other’s whispered speech.’

‘Tell me your tales of fairy land.’ She closed her eyes. I laid my lips close to her ear.

‘Once upon a time,’ I said, ‘long, long ago, life was more rude than it is now ; there was but little civilisation and no factories. Yet men were happier than they are now, because they saw the truth. They saw how the world was, and they knew God. They knew that God was not in some heaven, but in this world, that He lived in the stars, the sun, in all life there is ; that He walked in the waters and the wind ; that all life, no matter what nor where, was His, was Him. They knew that God lived in the world, which was His garment, that your soul and mine are particles of Him.

They saw this, how, I know not, but they saw and said it. They spoke in simple language, for their words were few, and they used imagery. They said there was spirit in the sun, in clouds and winds, that there were naiads in the streams, and fauns in all the forests. That was their way of saying that the world is all alive. They felt the life in all things. All men saw this, because it’s true. Their fairy tales are true.’

She opened eyes of wonder on me as I spoke.

‘Do not you know and feel it’s true?’ I said. ‘Look at

“the golden light

That will not leave the myrrh bush on the height”

or hear the river sing its slumber-song. Are these dead things that do that ?'

'I know,' she said, 'I know.'

'And there were greater seers,' I said, 'who said that all this life, that which lay in light, in wind, in stream, in trees, in animals, and man, was really one. Though it seemed many, it was one, one God, who lived and made the world, His world, lived in it as your soul in you.'

'Tell on,' she said.

'They knew too that this Soul, this God, is Love, and that He never dies. He is all Love there is. Every love we feel is part of God. He is Immortal, and He works to make His garment more befitting Him, more beautiful for ever. Our souls are part of God, and this world is our world for ever.'

'Why did they ever forget so wonderful a truth ?' she said.

'Priests tried to kill it, priests of all kinds.'

'Is it all dead ?'

'No, no,' I said, 'truth never dies. It rises ever anew, despite those who would slay it. Look in this country. They have no priests, and therefore they see this truth and they are happy. Francis d'Assisi saw it, and many others. It will rise again. Truth never dies. It sleeps maybe a while and rises.'

'Thank you,' she said, 'my husband,' and she closed her eyes in happiest thought and

sleep. I felt her heart beat unto mine and her warm glow come into me.

I did not sleep. Thoughts came and went within my brain, thoughts of this truth so obvious and so simple, thoughts of the foolishness of men. Priests try to kill it, that they may make themselves as God. Think of it, think of it.

And scientific men try to kill it. Why, I do not know, perhaps out of sheer blindness.

Yet if they saw their own science truly they would know that this is true. They work out a scheme of evolution in details more or less true, and do not see that by the very fact that they postulate the evolution of all things they postulate a soul in all things. Evolution is movement towards the accomplishment of a purpose; can energy do that? Action and reaction of energy are equal. The law of all energy is to dissipate itself, to make an equilibrium where there is neither heat nor cold nor light nor dark nor anything at all. The power that counterbalances this and concentrates energy again is life. Nothing but Life does this. If, then, after immemorial time the sun still shines, the water flows, the breezes move, it is because in them is Life. Nothing could be more certain than this truth, that Life, in some way we do not understand, permeates and inhabits all things, has created all things and maintains them.

Are scientific men but bats and moles that they cannot see the inevitable conclusion of their own premises? Can they not see that the legends and the fairy tales of the old world that they denounce as falsehoods are the truest of the true?

Priests and scientific men, not science, are both the same in this; they cannot see the truth that lies before them. They dare not, they have closed their eyes. Priests banish God, and scientific men deny Him. Yet God lives in this world. He is the World Soul. All things are but His garment, that ever changing dress, that through death is ever young. It changes, and is in itself nothing, therefore the East has called it maya or illusion, because of its want of permanence. What lives is Life, that makes this garment for itself to wear in fashions changing towards a far-off, dreamed perfection. But the Life is God, and God is Love unchangeable for ever—in this world.

The Greeks saw this as all early people did before their eyes were blinded—and they said it beautifully. But no one now can read their legends. Truth has departed from us, and there is no truth within us to echo to that in the legends. Yet consider this. In the beginning the Titans, Oceanus, and Tithys, that is, pure elemental forces, ruled the sea, but they

were conquered by Neptune and Amphitrite.
A soul had come into the sea—and is there
still—for all who look under the surface.

‘Great God, I’d rather be
A Pagan, suckled in a creed outworn,
So might I, standing on this pleasant lea,
Have glimpses that would make me less forlorn,
Have sight of Proteus rising from the sea,
And hear old Triton blow his wreathed horn.’

Well, he that hath eyes to see and ears to
hear, he still can see and hear.

CHAPTER XI

‘The stars of midnight shall be dear
To her, and she shall bend her ear
In many a secret place,
Where rivulets have their wayward round ;
And beauty born of murmuring sound
Shall pass into her face.’

WORDSWORTH.

XI



WE wake at last, as it is time to go back to the raft, but when we come down to the river the boat is gone.

I look at my husband, and he looks at me ; dismay is in my face, in his a mixture of surprise and amusement. Then he looks up and down along the river. There is the mark of her bows where she was beached on the sand, but no sign whatever of the Water-Insect herself. The river is perfectly bare, no boat nor anything in sight. A sense of the most profound desolation comes over me.

He only gives a whistle.

‘What do you think has happened?’ I ask. ‘Has some one stolen it?’

He shakes his head. ‘No one would steal it. The boat would be useless to any one except me. No Burman could manage it. Their boats are quite different.’

‘What, then, has happened?’

'I can only suppose,' he says, looking whimsically at me, 'that she was so upset by the way you treated her that she has lost her head and bolted.'

'Oh don't,' I say, catching his arm, 'don't make fun of me. I am nearly crying as it is.'

For I am frightened. Never before have I been lost. In England you couldn't get lost if you tried. Never before have I been homeless and seen no prospect of getting home. The raft must be twenty miles ahead. It passed when we were at lunch. And there is no village in sight, nothing but hills and forest. Where shall we have dinner and sleep?

'How did it happen?' I ask again.

'I think,' he says seriously, 'that there was one of those sudden rises of the river of which I know no explanation. It will rise or fall sometimes a foot or so, just like a tide, and then return to its former level. Perhaps these rises are caused by earthquakes, of which there are many here, which you do not notice, or there may be some other explanation. I think the river rose, floated the boat away, and fell again.'

'And what are we to do?'

'Well,' he says, 'let's sit down and think it out.'

We sit down upon the highest part of the sand-bank, so that we can watch the river and see anything that passes. But there is nothing, only the early evening light on hill, on forest,

and on river. We might be the only people in the world.

‘We are shipwrecked,’ he says, ‘only in a totally new way. Our ship has not foundered, only abandoned us ; we are on a river, not a sea, and you are with me. I never heard of a man being shipwrecked with his bride before. It is a great improvement on the old method.’

‘Not for the bride,’ I say.

‘Would you have me shipwrecked alone ?’ he asks.

‘No, no,’ I say, ‘if anything is to happen to you, let it happen to me too, now and always.’

He pats my arm. ‘Nothing more serious than perhaps a night *à la belle étoile* can happen to either of us,’ he answers.

‘What must we do ?’

‘Well, we must do the proper thing,’ he says. ‘When people are shipwrecked, there is a certain orthodox routine that they must follow. At least, all the best authorities do so, and in such a strait we must not be unorthodox. *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Swiss Family Robinson* are the text-books on such matters. Let us follow them.’

‘I have forgotten what they did.’

He wrinkles up his forehead to recall his boyhood’s memories. ‘First we must rejoice at having escaped where so many were lost.’

‘No one is lost but us,’ I say dolefully, ‘and we haven’t escaped yet.’

‘No, so we had better omit that for the present. The next is to reconnoitre our neighbourhood.’

‘We have done that already: a sand-bank, a river, and any quantity of forest is all there is.’

‘Satisfactory so far. Lots of water to drink. Our predecessors had difficulty about that. Next we take an inventory of our possessions, first of our clothes.’

‘A bathing-suit, a dressing-gown, a straw hat, and sandals for each,’ I say tragically. ‘Also two rugs.’

‘Not a very dressy set-out, but enough. Now for provisions.’

‘The remains of our lunch,’ I say.

‘Two cold snipe; some fruit; half a bottle of wine and some biscuits: those for both of us; six cigars for me and one cigarette for you. For implements—two table-knives, two forks, two spoons, some plates, two tumblers and a corkscrew.’

‘Oh,’ I say, ‘what use is a corkscrew without bottles?’

‘Can’t tell yet,’ he answers. ‘Crusoe would have found a use for it, therefore we must. Is there no more?’

‘Nothing.’

He looks at me reproachfully. ‘Lesbia,’ he says, ‘you are not playing fair. You are concealing and keeping for your own

use implements that should be put into the common stock.'

'I'm not,' I say indignantly.

'You are,' he affirms. 'You have some iron wire that will do excellently for fish-hooks.'

For a moment I am puzzled ; then I say, 'My hairpins?'

He nods.

'You can't have them,' I say briefly ; 'they are private property.'

He sighs resignedly. 'Then our inventory is finished. It only remains now to make a resolution.'

'What resolution?'

'To stay here till we are rescued.'

As there isn't anywhere to go, for I couldn't walk through the forest, such a resolution seems to me superfluous. However, he says it will calm our minds to take it, so we do. Then we carry it out. We sit and watch the river.

'What will become of the raft?' I ask.

'I told Po Chon to go on to a certain village about twenty-five miles below, and if we hadn't rejoined by then to stop there till we did. He will not know that we have lost the boat.'

'What will become of the boat?'

'Who knows? It may strand anywhere or go floating on.'

'What will become of us?'

'Some boat will pass and take us off, you may be sure of that. I don't know why the

river is so deserted just now. Generally there are boats in sight all day.'

He seems so calm, so confident, so determined to take it as a joke that I give in. I must trust him, and I feel I can. But for better company I sit close up to him, leaning against him. He feels so strong, so calm.

'This is the way,' he says, 'that Spot and Lady sit.'

So it is. I have often seen them in the bows sitting together like this. And after all there is a common nature runs through all of us; all life is in its essentials one.

The day draws on towards its ending. Skeins of wild duck and geese pass down the river. Egrets and cranes desert their fishing stands and travel inland, long flights of parrots pass. The day's work is done and everything goes home—but us.

The shadows rise and spread and still no boat.

At last a big one passes. But it is far away by the other bank, and they do not hear or do not heed our shouts. The crew are, he says, no doubt at supper in the well of the boat, and cannot hear nor see. It drifts along, and soon is out of sight. The solitude becomes more still and the dusk comes.

'Lesbia,' he says, 'it's time for supper, then to bed.'

'There's not much supper,' I say, 'and there is no bed.'

'The bed has to be made,' he answers; 'I will go and get the bedding. Will you stay here?'

'Where are you going?' I ask, alarmed.

'Only to the forest. You will be all right here. You aren't afraid.'

'No-o,' I say, 'I am not *afraid*. But I think I'll come with you all the same.'

'Then come along.'

We go to the forest edge, and with a table-knife he cuts dry grass and moss and ferns and makes two big bundles. One he lifts on to my head, the other he carries on his shoulder. So laden, we return and find a sheltered hollow in the sand.

'This is our bedroom,' he declares, 'and I will be the housemaid and make the bed.'

He sets to work to dig out the dry sand and make a trough. He does it with his hands exactly as Spot digs a hole after a rat. It makes me laugh to watch him. When it is finished, he lines this with the grass and ferns, the moss he places for a pillow. Then he spreads one of our rugs upon the grass.

'Behold your bed, madam,' he says, 'and now for supper.'

We eat the remains of our lunch with appetite, drink the rest of the wine, and feel much comforted. Then as a cool breeze begins to pass it's time for bed.

I go to bed first and he comes in beside me.

We spread the other rug over us and pull down more grass and dry, warm sand to cover us up. We are as warm and cosy as can be, as close, as close. The stars are watching us and laugh. How big the stars are here, not like the tiny diamond points of northern skies, but great bright jewels hung low down in the immensity. Orion, proud of his glorious belt, is on the horizon, and overhead the Pleiades. I count them and make thirteen.

‘Are you quite comfortable?’

‘Yes.’

‘And are you sleepy?’

‘I shall never be able to sleep,’ I say, ‘with all these eyes upon me.’

‘No?’

Two owls come past and cry ‘Zee-gwet, zee-gwet,’ and flit away into the dark. A sudden fear comes over me. My heart grows cold; my hold about my husband tightens.

‘Listen,’ I say, ‘there’s something that moves.’

He listens and shakes his head. ‘It is the ripple on the beach. What did you fear?’

‘Tigers.’

‘They will not come,’ he says.

‘You are *sure*?’

‘Quite sure.’

‘We are quite safe?’

‘As safe as on the raft.’

But still I do not feel inclined for sleep. The great spaces of the night trouble me. I want four walls to shut me in. I cannot even shut my eyes.

‘Yes,’ he says when I tell him, ‘I was like that. But now I am accustomed to the night. I love the stars; I have slept out so often; but never like this—like this.’

‘Tell me another tale,’ I say, ‘to make me sleep.’

‘Baby of mine,’ he laughs.

But I insist, and at last he says: ‘Have you ever read the story of “The Sleeping Beauty”?’

‘Of course I have,’ I answer. ‘As a child I read it in a fairy book, and I have read “The Day Dream.”’

‘And understood it?’

‘What is there to understand? It is a fairy story, that is all.’

‘It is a legend, true,’ he says, ‘of all the world, of every woman that has ever lived or will live.’

‘Then true of me?’

‘Most true of you,’ he says.

I lie a moment thinking silently. ‘Tell me the tale,’ I say.

He tells it me, dropping the words into my ear like soft music.

'The charmed wood,' he says, 'is a girl's heart, where all passions sleep, where no wind ever moves, where understanding never comes. To a girl's eyes the world is meaningless; she has not felt the purpose of the world nor heard its music. Evil and good are words—but words—and life and death. Nothing can reach her shut in that enchanted wood. The world is but a dream to her because she does not understand.'

I nod. 'Yes, it is so,' I whisper.

'Until into that wood, her heart, there comes a Prince.'

'A Prince,' I cry, 'with joyful eyes
And fleet-footed than the fox.'

He laughs. 'You know the story now? Then tell it me.'

'I know, I know,' I say. 'Yes, it is true. The Prince comes in and takes her.'

'Where?'

'Into the world,' I answer. 'She goes with him wherever he leads her:

"And on her lover's arm she leant,
And round her waist she felt it fold,
And far across the hills they went
In that new world—which is the old:

Across the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day
'Thro' all the world she followed him.'"

I feel his arms close closer round me. 'Go on,' he says, 'and tell me what she sees.'

'It is the same old world,' I say; 'the hills, the woods, the people are the same. Yet the world is new, because she sees into its heart; she loves, she knows, she understands. Her heart beats now through his, with the world's heart; the love that made all things, that is all things, eternal in the world, awakes within her.'

'It is her,' he says, 'her real self.'

'It is her soul,' I say.

'It is in all the world,' he answers. 'Sweet-heart, look up to the stars. Are you now afraid of them?'

I am not. They are eyes that laugh in answer to my laugh, that love as I love too.

'They are God's eyes,' I say. 'I love them.'

'Now look at me,' he says.

I look at him.

'Your eyes too are God's eyes,' he says, 'for love shines in them and all love is God.'

I sleep—and wake sometimes, feeling afraid of the strangeness all about.

I move and touch him, and I see the stars above. I sleep again.

In the early dawn I wake again and see the pearly light growing upon the mountains far

above. I see the stars grow dim—and sleep
again.

‘ And o’er them many a sliding star
And many a merry wind was borne,
And streamed through many a golden bar
The twilight melted into morn.’

CHAPTER XII

‘ I have fought my fight, I have lived my life,
I have drunk my share of wine :
From Trier to Coln there was never a knight
Led a merrier life than mine.’

KINGSLEY.

XII



WAS aware through my closed eyelids that the dawn was come and that it was time to get up, but I didn't feel inclined to move. For one thing there was nothing to get up for, no clothes to dress in, no tea to drink, and then Lesbia was still asleep.

I had experience that she did not like to be woke up too early. I had no idea that any one could be so lazy as Lesbia, so ready to go to bed early and get up late as she is. She liked putting out the candle at both ends. I disapproved of that, but my disapproval didn't affect her as it should, and by experience I knew she made reprisals. I was beginning to have a great respect for Lesbia. So I lay still.

Then I heard a sound, at first it was a very faint and distant sound, but growing gradually nearer and clearer. It was a footstep coming along the sand.

It approached, it stopped, and the clear morning silence was broken by a laugh, a

cheery, mellow, mirth-provoking chuckle that rumbled within some capacious chest and woke me up completely.

I opened my eyes, and there before me stood a man. He was a big strong man, his attitude was careless, his legs were well apart, one hand held a gun, the other rested on his hip. His face was round and ruddy, his eye was blue, and on his lips there lay the ripple of a laugh as of a happy, brave, and careless nature bubbling to the surface.

He looked at me and I at him.

'Hallo!' I said.

'Hallo!' he answered. 'This *is* a surprise. It's Gallio.'

'Just so,' I said. 'It's me. That's natural enough, but what are *you* doing here?'

He looked at me and then at Lesbia asleep, then back at me again. From me his glance passed over the sand-bank and back.

'Hum! Natural, did you say?' he asked.

'The most natural thing in life,' I answered, 'that I am here. But you! that is another matter. Why, when I said "Good-bye" to you last it was in Paris.'

'True,' and he nodded. 'We had dined in a restaurant on the "Boul Mich" and after dinner . . .'

'Then what do you mean,' I interposed hastily, 'by turning up like this without notice on a sand-bank in the middle of Asia?'

‘Well,’ he replied reflectively, ‘it is like this. I return from leave, I am posted to Upper Burma, I take ten days’ holiday at Christmas-time for a shoot along the river. I leave my camp before the dawn to seek for wild geese and duck. I travel down the river in a boat. I pass a sand-bank. It seems quite an ordinary bank, no notice up nor anything to distinguish it from other banks. But I see upon that sand two objects.’

‘Objects?’ I asked.

‘Objects,’ he answered, ‘of natural history. Round objects, one dark, one golden-red. I look at them but cannot make them out. They say “It’s ghosts.” I say “It’s geese, two totally new geese, or perhaps pheasants, one very fine in plumage.” So I take my gun and land to add them to my collection.’

‘Most kind of you,’ I said.

‘Don’t mention it. When I come near, the objects resolve themselves into two heads belonging apparently to human beings buried in the sand. They seem to be perfectly alive.’

‘We’re quite alive,’ I answered. One of us was also kicking at intervals, but I didn’t mention that.

‘The short plumaged bird turns out to be a man, an old friend of mine named Gallio. The golden pheasant——’

‘Is Mrs. Gallio.’

He bowed in stately fashion. ‘Accept my

best congratulations. I did not know that you were married.'

'Since three days ago,' I answered.

I wondered why Lesbia kicked specially hard just then.

'And you have chosen this sand-bank to spend your honeymoon on? Most natural I admit. Have you bought it, or only rented it for a time?'

'Neither,' I answered.

'Merely annexed it. I see. I think you might introduce me, Gallio.'

'My wife is asleep,' I answered. 'You can see that for yourself. It's obvious.'

It certainly was obvious, on the surface. Her eyes were closed, her face half hidden by her arms, her lips half parted. But whether the sleep extended far down into Lesbia I had my doubts. It didn't seem to affect her legs, for instance.

'You should put up a name-board,' he suggested, 'to keep off intruders.'

'It is not necessary,' I answered. 'We do not own this bank. In fact, although we may seem to you and even to ourselves to be here established in this sand, we aren't. Appearances are deceptive. We are really nowhere.'

The Cavalier stared. 'What, nowhere? You are not anywhere at all.'

'Just so; we are lost,' I explained.

His surprise turned to a look of deepest sympathy. 'What! Lost?'

'Certainly. L-o-s-t lost, you know.'

'But how lost? Who lost you?'

'We lost ourselves, or rather,' I corrected, 'our boat lost us. We are two shipwrecked mariners in fact.'

He stared about over the sands. 'I see no shipwreck.'

'Well,' I said, 'never mind,' for I felt a vigorous nudge. 'I'll tell you afterwards. It's our time for getting up. If you'll go back to your boat, we'll soon come down and join you. Perhaps you can give us tea.'

'I can,' he said.

'And a lift to somewhere.'

'With the greatest pleasure.'

'Then au revoir,' I said.

His laugh came back, he glanced from me to sleeping Lesbia, took off his hat and made a sweeping bow, then said :

'I will await you. And I look forward to make Mrs. Gallio's acquaintance.' Then he marched away.

As soon as his broad back was turned, Lesbia opened one eye, and cautiously reconnoitred with it. Seeing that the coast was clearing fast she opened the other, and then said quickly :

'Who's that?'

'An old friend of mine. He's Irish.'

‘He reminds me of some one. Who?’

‘The Laughing Cavalier.’

Her face lit up. ‘And so he is, just like. How awful.’

It was quite evident that her second sentence didn't follow the first. It was a consequent without apparent precedent. I was aware that Lesbia's mind worked like that sometimes, but mine was not agile enough to follow, so I had to ask :

‘In what way awful?’

‘For him to find us here.’

‘Not awful at all,’ I answered. ‘Where would you have him find us? If he found us anywhere he was bound to find us here. He couldn't discover us in a place where we were not.’

But Lesbia only gave me a glance of pure contempt.

‘Besides, he never discovered you at all. You were pretending to be asleep,’ I added.

I don't know what there was in this simple and true remark to make Lesbia furious. I can't think what she thought she gained by pretending to be asleep when it was quite obvious she wasn't. Here was another respect in which Lesbia's mind was unfathomable to me. I had some idea that Lesbia thought there would have been something embarrassing in the Cavalier's finding us in our sand-bed but for her presence of mind in pretending to be

asleep. That saved the situation. Anyhow, her eyes flashed fire, but she was silent.

‘Why did you kick so much?’ I asked.

‘Why did you want to tell him we were just married?’ she replied.

‘Because it’s true,’ I answered simply.

‘As if that were any reason,’ she muttered to herself. ‘How like a man.’

All this time I was getting up, pulling out grass and sand and rugs, and, finally, Lesbia. It’s always a labour to get Lesbia out of bed. But at last I got her loose and stood her up, and then I looked at her.

‘Lesbia,’ I said, ‘you *are* untidy.’

She examined herself as best she could without a glass, both back and front. She saw the sand and leaves upon her cloak, she felt the mosses in her hair.

And then she turned on me.

‘You are no better,’ she said.

‘No; but I think I bear it better,’ I answered mildly. ‘I can carry it off. You can’t. I am not so dependent on my appearance.’

She thought a minute. ‘Go down,’ she said, ‘and borrow from your friend two towels, some soap, a clothes-brush and a hair-brush, and come back. I suppose he has such things, even if he is an old Master and just descended from a frame.’

‘I expect he has,’ I answered. ‘Anything more?’

‘A looking-glass.’

‘Your vanity carries you away,’ I remonstrated.

‘I won’t go to the boat unless you bring them,’ she declared, and sat down determinedly upon the sand. ‘I’d sooner stay here until I die than go like this.’

So, as I didn’t wish that Lesbia should die for want of such trifles, I went down and borrowed the things. When I came back, she gave me orders.

‘Brush me,’ she said.

I brushed her.

‘Now go and wet one towel and wash my face and hands.’

I washed them. I liked washing them, they were so pretty and so soft.

‘Now brush my hair.’

She sat down on a rug and turned her back to me. When she let down her hair it fell like molten gold about her shoulders and her back. I brushed. It seemed to thrill my every nerve as I stroked and straightened it.

‘Lesbia,’ I said, ‘my dream is now fulfilled.’

‘What dream?’

‘You remember I told you about red hair.’ But she only sniffed.

I could have brushed for days, but as soon as all the leaves and moss were well brushed out, and her hair was clean and bright, she took it from me. With those secreted hair-

pins, that by all precedent should have been fish-hooks long ago, she did it up again in most mysterious fashion. 'Now I am ready,' she said.

'But I?'

She looked at me and laughed, gave me a hasty brush; then saying, 'It doesn't matter about you—you are a man and say that you can bear it—I want my tea,' she marched me off.

I wondered how she and the Cavalier would meet and would get on. I would have liked that every one of my old friends should be a brother to her and she to them a sister. But would she, could she—and they?

However, as regards the present, my fears were soon set at rest. As soon as he saw us coming, he came to meet us, but neither by look nor word did he betray that he had seen Lesbia before.

'Indade,' he said, with a bow and smile, 'this is an unexpected pleasure. Gallio I know of old; it would never surprise me if I met him anywhere. But to meet a fairy princess too—here in the forest.'

Lesbia smiled. 'An unconventional and a hungry fairy, I'm afraid,' she said.

'The better for that,' he answered, and led the way with her down to the shore.

His second boat with servants had arrived,

and on the shore a table had been set out. A fire near by showed there was cooking going on.

‘I know you’re hungry; I should be,’ he said. ‘There’s little to eat on sand-banks. Breakfast is ready.’ So we sat down.

It was an excellent breakfast that he gave us, and we enjoyed it. Lesbia, let me never hear you scoff again at men’s material appetites. You ate and ate. The morning sun shone on us, and the waters sang as they went past. The ceiling of our breakfast-room was heaven, the walls were mountains, and earth was the floor.

When she’d finished, she said, ‘Thank you for such a meal. And thank you again for coming out of your frame.’

The Cavalier looked blank. I don’t think he knew his likeness.

‘I’ve often admired you,’ Lesbia continued. ‘I’ve often wished I’d lived in the times when you did. I never guessed you’d come to life again and meet us on a sand-bank and give us breakfast.’

‘Eh?’ he said, turning to me for help.

‘Don’t look to me,’ I answered. ‘Fight your own battles. I have to.’

‘You looked so proud,’ she continued, ‘in your lace collar. Where is your collar gone, and your hat? Only your laugh remains.’

‘Faith,’ he said, ‘and it’s the laugh will follow the collar soon. What have I done?’

‘Tell him,’ I said ; so she told him, and he laughed ; then said in injured tones :

‘The thafe to take my portrait and I not looking. Pwhat did ye say the snap-shot artist was ?’

‘Franz Hals.’

‘Sure, then, I’ll not forget him—in my prayers. But tell me now, where do you want to go ?’

‘To join our raft, where our home is.’

‘Oh ! Then you have a home ?’

‘Of course we have,’ said indignant Lesbia. ‘Did you think we lived always in bathing-dress and dressing-gown on sand-banks, and trusted to chance for food ?’

‘I didn’t know,’ he answered simply. ‘I know nothing about fairies. I supposed they didn’t need such things. Where is the raft ?’

‘Below here somewhere. Where are you bound for ?’

‘To shoot along the river, and to Sagaing for Christmas.’

‘Just where we’re going,’ said Lesbia, ‘and Christmas is only two days off.’ Then with a glance at me : ‘Perhaps if a cavalier of such renown as Mr. Hals will accept it, we could offer him some hospitality, as our way is the same as his. A breakfast such as this needs a requital.’

And so it was arranged. He was to take us down the river to our raft and pass the day with us. Next day we probably would reach

Sagaing. We started soon, and the boatmen rowed us down the river.

‘Why, there is the raft!’ cried Lesbia as we turned a bluff.

And there it was, moored to the bank above a village. It looked quite calm although it had lost its master and its mistress. A thin film of smoke above the kitchen showed that lunch was on the cook.

‘Oh, isn’t it nice,’ she said, and clasped her hands, ‘to see our home again, a roof and walls and floor, clean clothes, a chair, a bed.’

‘Spoiled child of an effete civilisation,’ I said.

She only laughed. ‘I never was lost before. I never valued a home before,’ she said, ‘as I do the raft.’

‘Sure, there’s the *Deebo* too,’ said Hals.

And so she was, moored to the raft as if she had never wandered, never lost us, never lost herself. She showed no sign of consciousness that she had acted in any other way than a right-minded boat should act. In fact, the two dogs were the only people that evinced any pleasure at our return. Po Chon received us with an air of injury. Dinner, he said, last night had been spoiled by our non-appearance; the same with breakfast this morning; but lunch would be ready soon.

I looked at Lesbia.

‘Make it for three,’ she said; and Po Chon nodded.

CHAPTER XIII

‘Women have lovers, but men have friends.’

GANGLER.

XIII



IAITH, and it wasn't without some doubt that I accepted the Gallios' invitation to spend the day and dine with them. 'Patrick, my boy,' says I to myself, 'you'll have to be very careful. New-married folk upon their honeymoon are as tender as poached eggs, and as full of themselves as the sea is full of salt. You'll have to walk as gingerly as if every toe of you was a corn—and hurting. It's praising God you ought to be that your parents made an Irishman of you, and, like all the Irish, tactful as a cat.'

And sure it was so. They looked, they talked, they lived to one another, at one another. Each spoke to me that the other might hear, and when I spoke he looked at her and she at him, as if to ask, 'There, what do *you* think of that?'

But they didn't leave me out neither. It's as nice as nice can be that both were to me. It was, 'Mr. Hals, you'll take that easy-chair

and that cushion and make yourself at home. It was, 'Franz, don't smoke these black cheroots of yours. Here are some good havanas, try them, and have a drink as well.'

For its showing off they were, each to the other, how good a host or hostess he or she could be. I was their first guest, and they coddled me as if I had been their first baby. I don't say I didn't like it. But it was vexing too. For each was saying in every tone and act and look, not only to each other, but to me, 'Sure marriage is a happy state. It's heaven. Poor bachelor, he doesn't know. How ignorant he is and how unhappy. Let's open his blind eyes.'

Each wanted to drive down my throat what a jewel was the other. Well, and I am not saying either was wrong, am I? Gallio has always been a friend of mine, and as to Mrs. Gallio—when I first saw her in her dressing-gown I thought her fine, but when I saw her afterwards in a white muslin frock, with her glorious hair and deep-blue eyes, why, I just worshipped her. 'If she's as nice as she is pretty, it's Gallio that is the lucky man,' thinks I.

It was after tea that Mrs. Gallio got me. I saw she wanted me, to talk about her husband to me, as she could not do before his face. Gallio was busy in his boat with a carpenter impressed from a village we had passed. The

Deebo had suffered some damage when on her own, had been up to some larks, I guess, and left part of her false keel behind her somewhere. So Mrs. Gallio talked to me while Gallio worked.

‘There’s one thing I cannot understand,’ says she, ‘and it puzzles me. Perhaps, Herr Hals, you can explain it.’

‘Of course I can,’ says I.

‘It’s about Po Chon,’ says she. ‘He is my husband’s very old servant, and devoted to him.’

‘That’s true,’ says I. ‘I’ve known Po Chon for many years, and a real good fellow he is. There’s nothing he would not do for Gallio.’

‘Yet,’ says she, ‘when we don’t return last night he doesn’t seem to mind. He is not anxious. He does not send the villagers to look for us, nor come himself. Yet he knew some accident must have happened, because the boat drifted down.’

‘Aye, aye ; that’s queer,’ says I, reflecting. ‘He didn’t seem upset at all when we arrived.’

‘Not in the least,’ says she. ‘It might have been all according to arrangement. How’s that?’

‘Faith, and I do not know,’ says I. ‘It’s queer. But here comes Po Chon, I’ll ask him.’

‘Perhaps my husband wouldn’t like,’ says she.

‘What ! Gallio ? He won’t mind. Look here, Po Chon,’ says I ; ‘when the empty

boat drifted back last night, what did you think had happened.'

'An accident,' says he.

'What sort of accident?'

'How should I know?' with a grunt.

'Did you suppose that they were drowned?' asks I.

He stared. 'Drowned? And how could my Thakin be drowned?'

There's no word to express his contempt and surliness at such a question.

'What does he say?' asks Mrs. Gallio.

'He thinks us fools,' says I, 'for supposing anything *could* happen to your husband.'

'But why?' says she. 'Ask him why?'

'It's fourteen years,' says he, 'since I have been with the Thakin, and all that time he has been having accidents. Up there in the wild country the savages used to try and shoot him. He gets lost in the jungle; he falls off his horse; he nearly gets drowned; he gets fever and everything there is. He loses all his money. He gets his camp burned, and he loses everything more than once. He is always nearly being dead.'

'And never is quite?' asks I.

'No!' says Po Chon with scorn.

'Why not?'

Po Chon has been clearing away the tea-things and putting the furniture right. He talks usually with his head down, as if shy or sulky,

in short, curt sentences. But at this question of mine he looks up fully in my face astonished.

‘Because of what’s written on his face,’ says he.

‘My husband’s face,’ says Mrs. Gallio, clasping her hands, when I translate. ‘What is it that’s written on his face? Please ask him.’

But Po Chon only grumbles to himself. ‘What’s written on my Thakin’s face? Why, every one can see what’s written. When he goes into even a stranger village, the people see it. The very children see it. To ask what’s written, indeed!’ He finished his work in a contemptuous silence, and then disappeared.

‘What does he mean?’ says she.

‘These people think,’ says I, ‘that a man’s fate is more or less settled before he’s born at all, at all. And it’s not so wrong they are neither, Mrs. Gallio. Sure, it’s a duke—an Irish duke, of course—I would have been born had I the choice, and not son of a poor army surgeon, and it’s clever I would have been and good looking. So I wouldn’t have had to work. But I couldn’t help myself, you see.’

‘It’s true,’ she says, reflecting; ‘fate does much, not all.’

‘That’s what they mean,’ I says; ‘that a man’s birth and parents and temperament and education pretty well settle his hash for him. But with Gallio it’s something more they mean, I think.’

‘What more?’

I shook my head. ‘Faith, and I do not know. But I remember now that when we were in the same station years ago, I have heard the people talk of your husband as having something strange in his face. I’ve heard them say, “Look at his face. It’s not the same as the faces of other Thakins.”’

‘What did they mean?’

‘They never explained.’

‘It’s something secret, something mysterious, something mystical,’ says she, excited. ‘Some magic of the East.’

‘Oh no,’ says I. ‘There isn’t any magic here. But the people are sensitive to character. They have a sympathy and understanding we don’t have. They seem to feel and recognise the inwardness of a man in a way we never do. And there *is* something unusual in your husband’s face.’

‘Of course there is,’ says she, as proud of Gallio’s face as any peahen of her husband’s tail. ‘That’s why I married him.’

Just then Po Chon came back. ‘Ask him,’ says she, ‘if anything is written in *my* face.’

But Po Chon wasn’t to be drawn.

‘What should be written,’ he grumbles, not even glancing at Mrs. Gallio, ‘except that she should marry my Thakin?’

I feared at first to tell her, lest she should be offended, but she was not. She was delighted

and clapped her hands. 'Of course,' says she. 'I share what 's written in his face. It is for both.'

'Maybe,' says I. 'But Po Chon 's right in another way, Mrs. Gallio. There never was a man so constantly in trouble as your husband. If there 's no trouble at hand, he goes to look for it. He 's never quiet.'

She looks quite soberly at me. 'Yes, so I have found out. He says the beauty of life is its danger,' and she sighed.

'Sure, and that 's true,' says I.

'Are all men like that?' she asks.

'All men who are *men*,' says I. 'The trousered things that shriek always for peace and safety regardless of all else, they are not men.'

'But I like peace,' says she.

'That 's true for you,' says I. 'Women like peace—and stir up war, and men like war, but strive for peace.'

'That is a paradox,' says she.

'Maybe, but it 's true,' says I. 'All the wars I have been in, and all the wars I ever heard of, public or private, came from women or woman-minded men. It was a woman, for instance, who ruined the Burmese empire. When men get back their own again, there 's peace.'

'How all you men despise us women!' says she, and turns on me reproachful eyes of blue.

'Patrick,' says I to myself, 'I ought to kick

ye, aye and I will when I get ye by yerself, ye fool of a man. Tact of a cat ye have! tact of a hippopotamus more like, blundering out a silly truth like that. Ate dirt, ye omadhaun, and be ashamed of yerself.'

'Madam,' says I, 'even if that be true, there is a truer truth, that whether men make peace or war, or live or die, it's all for you. Faith, and ye're worth it.'

The blue eyes puckered up into the jolliest laugh. 'Herr Hals,' says she, 'I recognise again the Cavalier I've known so long. That's just what he would have said.'

'And done.'

'I believe that too,' says she.

'I suppose,' says she, 'that you were with my husband on the frontier.'

'I was,' says I. 'That's where we got to know each other. Faith, and ye see things about a man there ye don't anywhere else.'

'What kind of things?' says she.

'What's inside of him,' says I. 'In peace ye see just the man's outside, the varnish and lacquer and painted designs upon his cuticle. War wears these off, and ye see the man.'

'It makes me cross,' says she, 'sometimes, to think how much my husband lived before he knew of me. It seems unfair to me somehow. He didn't have oughted to.'

'But he couldn't help,' says I.

'So I forgive,' says she, 'and I want to hear. Tell me a story of your life up there.'

'I will,' says I, and thinks, and thinks, and then I says: 'Maybe he's told you of Kalè.'

She shakes her head. 'He does not talk of himself; that's why I ask you, Herr Hals.'

'Well, then, here goes,' says I. 'Kalè, I must tell ye, was a town.'

'Hold on,' says Gallio, coming suddenly round the salon. 'Is it tellin' ye stories he is, my dear? You aren't believing them.'

'It's about you,' says she; 'sit down and hear yourself described. I'm going to be told of that black past of yours.'

'I'll go away,' groans he. 'I never did like scandal—except about other people,' and makes to move.

'Sit down,' says she, jumping up and catching him by the arm. 'Go on,' says she to me, 'I have him fast.' She pulled him into a chair next hers and held him all the time, stroking his hand sometimes when she thought I wasn't looking—and of course I wasn't.

'Well then,' says I, 'there was a town called Kalè, that was once a great city, nearly a mile square, with high brick walls and a moat, but was reduced to be a little village camped in the middle of the ruined walls with but a fence round it.'

'How was that?' says she.

'Don't know,' says I, 'but so it was. 'Kalè

is in a valley, and just beyond it rises the great range of mountains that make the frontier. Now, on these hills there live a small, black, murderous set of bloodthirsty savages called Chins.'

She smiled.

'Faith, you may smile, Mrs. Gallio, comfortably here on your raft, but it was no smiling matter ten years ago. They came raiding down, burning and murdering and kidnapping till there was little of the valley left. Gallio was there as Political.'

'Where were you?' she asks.

'Elsewhere,' says I, 'till I was sent up with two other officers and a hundred men to help Gallio.'

'What was the matter with him?' asks she.

'Not much with *him*,' says I. 'But a hundred miles of valley was in an awful state, burning and being robbed and murdered at nights. Gallio, with about a hundred and thirty men was trying to prevent two thousand savages from enjoying themselves, and failing, naturally, and the savages sending word they were going to kill him very soon.'

'How awful!' says she, and clutches his arm.

'So we went to help him because he was a bit lonesome.'

'He must have been awfully glad to see you,' says she.

'He was. He said he hadn't played a game

of whist for six months, and was out of baccy. So we camped in an old monastery in Kalè, and had a high old time.'

'What did you do?' she asks.

'Do?' says I. 'There was lashings to do. Mornings we would go out with fifty men or so and climb the mountains to try and catch the raiders; evenings we played whist.'

'Do you call what Young played whist?' asks Gallio.

'Young! Sure, he would break any one's heart at any game. We went to bed at nine and got up at two.'

'What for?' asks Mrs. Gallio.

'To make a party with the savages if they came. They sent down word that thousands of them were coming to eat us up.'

'That was brag,' says Mrs. Gallio.

'No brag,' says I. 'They meant it. So we got up and fell in, and made ready for the party in the dark. Faith, it was cold work I tell you, waiting for the savages to burst on us. Gallio used to make jokes.'

'How could you?' she says, and stares at him.

'I didn't,' he says. 'Franz made the jokes. I laughed.'

'He kept us all alive, Mrs. Gallio. That's why I tell you the story. He laughed and joked just as he does now on this raft. We could not have stood it but for him.'

‘What stuff!’ says Gallio. ‘Lesbia, he’s really talking of himself.’

She looked from one to other of us. ‘And you knew that death might be close at hand? How could you?’

‘Would you have had us cry?’ asks Gallio.

‘How could you joke with death so close?’ she says; and then to me: ‘Go on,’ says she. ‘Did the savages ever come?’

‘They did,’ says I. ‘Three times they came swarming down from the mountains at night in thousands to destroy us.’

‘But,’ she said, opening her eyes, ‘they didn’t destroy you.’

‘If we hadn’t been ready and waiting for them, they would,’ says I. ‘But though we kept as quiet as little mice, I suppose they heard us move inside the fence and heard the rattle of our arms. So they went away again. We found their traces in the morning, and pursued, but were too late.’

‘Then they were cowards,’ says she.

‘Not so,’ says I. ‘They fought like devils later on, when the column went up the hills. They were brave men, though savage.’

‘Then why didn’t they attack?’ asks she. ‘Would they have won,’ to Gallio, ‘had they attacked you when you were awake?’

‘Of course,’ he says. ‘We had but a hundred armed police, almost untrained, and not very good. We should have stood no chance.’

‘Then why?’ she asks; ‘then why?’

I only looked at her and drew her eyes to Gallio's face and raised my eyebrows. Why? I often wondered at that myself. Why didn't they wipe us out?

Because it was written on our foreheads.

It was a pleasant day I spent with them, and one that I will not forget. They were glad to have me, just as a break and to show off before me how happy they were. Perhaps they thought to convert me to their ways. But no; in vain is the net spread in the eyes of this old bird. Love is a pleasant thing, but marriage—not for Patrick, thank you. I've seen too much of it. I like love and peace, aye, and war too, each in its place, but all three mixed up together all the time—no, I'm not taking any. Yet what is marriage but that? The very happiest marriage is that—unhappy marriages are hell.

Good luck to ye both!

So after dinner I went back to my boat.

CHAPTER XIV

‘ Now Beauty feared the Beast because of his rough outside.’

Fairy Tale.

XIV



BEFORE the dawn has come the raft is moving. In the still night I hear the raftsmen call one to another. I feel the raft is freed. The stream no longer murmurs in the logs beneath, chafing and restless, but bears us on. For a few minutes there is the splash of oars and then a deeper silence, as we drift adown the river.

I see a pale grey light that oozes through the window. I would sleep again, but cannot, so I rise and look out of the window into a world of pearl. There is faint light upon the water and the fields; the sky is full of silver shimmer, and on the mountain peaks a promise of the day.

There is a sense of peace and yet of loneliness. I feel that I want something, some one. I call, he does not answer. Shall I go in to him? Shall I? And dare I?

I tremble when I lift the curtain. He is asleep.

I go up to the bed and look at him.

Is this my husband ?

He looks old. I see that his hair is grey upon his temples and his face is lined. His throat and part of his chest are bare, and one arm hangs out of the bed, the sleeve drawn back. I do not like to see him so ; I draw his coat together and pull down his sleeve. I see that he is strong, not beautiful. His chest, his arms are strong, rough, hairy, his face is rugged. All that is not for me.

I think that he is ugly. Yet when he is awake I find him handsome. I like to look at him then, the light of his eyes, his pose, his strength, his gestures, to hear the echo in his voice. But that is all departed now. His body is not for me. It is for the world. Those arms of his are strong, as men's are, to fight and to work. His hands are large, bony, and muscular, not good to look at except to recognise their strength and power.

His mental ability too, which shows in the lines upon his face and breadth of his head, is not for me. His knowledge and experience do not attract me, they rather frighten me. It is true that in a way he is built for me, because I benefit materially by the qualities which underlie his strength. They make the world smooth and endurable for me to live in. But they are not there to attract me, rather to capture me and carry me off will I, nill I, as

he says all women are in marriage in one form or another.

And indeed is it not true that we are always captured into marriage? We may look forward to it, we may like the man, but the engagement, the ceremony of marriage, above all the marriage itself, are we not forced into them by him? I do not say that we are not willing victims, that we do not like to be subdued and forced lovingly and kindly, yet we are forced for all that. And so, perhaps, this very ugliness of the outer man to us is part of that great scheme which makes men and women complements and not rivals to each other in all things physical and spiritual.

So physically, although he does not attract me as I do him, yet he is made for me after all.

And I am all made for him, though in quite another way, because I am beautiful. Has he not told me so a hundred times? My face, my arms, my bosom, how he loves to look on me, to touch, to kiss. I to him am beautiful, but he is ugly in my eyes. He is made for the world's work, not for my delight, as I for his.

He likes to see me sleeping, not I him.

I will go away.

But no, I will not go. I will sit down close by and think it out.

I love him—What do I love? That body on the bed? Not so. It is his soul I love, something that looks from out his waking eyes

and echoes in his voice. It now is sleeping.
That which I love is sunk beneath the verge.

He loves me for my form ; I love him for
his soul.

Then like a flash there comes to me the
meaning of that old legend of Beauty and the
Beast, which he told me was eternal of Man
and Woman. At the time, I did not under-
stand—now I see that it is true and what it
means. Man's love to woman is mainly
physical, woman's to man is mainly spiritual.
He loves her for her beauty, her weakness, her
purity, her tenderness : she loves him for the
strength, the understanding, the courage that
lies under his man's exterior, which repels her
till she sees beneath. I see, I see the legend now.

But which does that mean is the more
spiritual, I wonder—she, because she discerns
and loves it in him, whereas his love for her is
more purely physical ; or he, because his spirit
makes his outward shape forgotten ? I wonder,
oh, I wonder.

What is the use of thought ? I want *him*
back. Out of that mystery which we call
sleep I will call him back to me.

I put my lips to his and watch. A faint
unconscious smile spreads on his face. His
long-drawn respiration stops ; his eyes are
opening on mine, with wonder, with delight,
with love.

He catches hold of me and laughs.

‘How dare you come into the lion’s den?’ he asks. ‘Now I will eat you.’

‘Eat me,’ I answer. ‘But first you must tell me something.’

‘I will tell you anything.’

‘I want to know,’ I say, ‘I want to know——’

‘Daughter of Eve,’ he cries.

‘I want to know—a lot of things.’

‘What things?’

It is so hard to put it clearly. I sit and think, and at last I say :

‘You have borne dreadful things, done dreadful things, faced death yourself and given it to others.’

He nods.

‘You do not mind that? It does not hurt you to remember?’

‘No.’

‘If a woman had seen half, done half, what you have, either she would have died with the horror of it or her heart would have been hardened to a stone.’

He looks at me and smiles.

‘But you are neither,’ I continue. ‘Your heart is tender.’

‘That is one difference,’ he says, ‘between a man and a woman. Trouble and misery and fear temper us and do not break. Neither does sin stain us. We rise above our deeds, above our bodies.’

‘We cannot.’

‘You are too tender,’ and he laughs. ‘We are the opposing forces of the world. You are the dove of peace, and we the sword of war.’ And at the word his eyes light up again.

Then I am filled with jealousy and fear. I catch hold of him.

‘And which do you love best? the world-war, or your wife?’

He looks at me reflectively. I see that he is seeking for an answer.

‘You must tell me true?’ I say.

‘I will,’ he says, ‘but I must think.’

And while he thinks I watch the sunrise, which has grown from pink to crimson and to gold.

‘Listen,’ he says, ‘and I will tell you what wise men of old had to say about your question.’

‘Did they ask it?’ I demand, surprised.

‘They asked all things, just as we do now.’

‘And found their answer?’

‘Yes, and they found answers — better answers than we find now.’

‘Tell me the answer.’

‘They saw life clearly and they saw it *whole*. They did not separate one detail from another—the plants, the animals, and men and gods—but saw them all as one. One soul within one universe, striving to manifest and to express itself. That soul was God. But Soul consists of many things—of Love, of Hate, of War, of Peace, of Safety, of Danger, of Purity,

of Wisdom, and many more. All these work in the world to make it, acting and counter-acting. The sum is God, and each emotion was a god. That strong desire to fight, which is in all male life, to attack and to destroy, to have courage, to bear danger and face death, which is the most potent emotion towards the progress of the world, they called Ares, or Mars, or Thor. He is rough and hard outside, stained with his work, with dust, with blood, but his soul is of tempered and shining steel. That is the emotion that you fear in me. Love is a goddess—Venus, or Aphrodite, or Vishnu. She is tender and loving and true. She is the ever-beautiful, the ever-young, the ever-clean, arising daily from her bath in the sea waves. The world she cares not for, only one man whom she would wish to hold within her arms, nor ever let go free. That is the emotion that there is in you.'

'Yes, yes!' I say. 'Go on—what is the answer? Which won?'

'Oh,' he says, 'neither. Mars and Venus were husband and wife. They saw that was the answer.' And he laughs.

I stare at him and shake my head. It is so difficult, and I so new to life, born but four days ago. I cannot understand it yet. But I will keep this myth within my head, and it will unfold itself sometime, as the legend of Beauty and the Beast has done.

'Thank you,' I say. 'I hear Po Chon and cups and saucers. We must go out for our little breakfast now.'

The tea finished, my husband goes away to work at the *Deebo*, and I am left alone.

We are in the middle of the river, drifting down. Upon the west are low hills crowned with pagodas, very barren hills, but on the other bank there is a plain that stretches to the far-off mountain barrier of the Shan plateau.

On either side are frequent villages that stretch along close to the water, shadowed by figs and tamarinds and palms. Long, slender boats rock at their feet. All the world swims in golden light, even the lucent shadows are like crystal, clear and full of light. The love-moan of innumerable doves comes from the woods.

I look about for some one to talk to. Spot and Lady are in the bows, propped up against each other, watching for something to interest them. I call to them, but they do not care to hear. Very well then, I will inspect the family.

The nursery is a box, kept in a dark corner of the verandah by Lady's special request. I can't see the puppies very well in there, so I bring them out and lay them on the mat near my feet. The light and air and warmth will do them good.

What funny little beasts they are ! Quite blind as yet, though their eyes are half opened.

As I do this, Spot looks round. He seems surprised when he sees what I am about, shrugs his fat back as if to say, 'You'll catch it directly,' and turns away again.

A minute later Lady looks round. When she sees her family out in the open, she gives a start that unsettles even Spot. Then she darts back, picks up the babies one by one in her mouth and carries them back into the nursery, growling all the time in strong expostulation. When they are safe, she sits down on guard, and whines.

'Haven't you any sense ?' she seems to say, 'putting out blind babies in a strong light like that. A nice mother you'll make.'

I wonder what teaches her all this ? Instinct, they call it. Shall I have instinct when the time comes ? But instinct alone does not go far. I must have more, for I must learn. I sit and think and think. How sweet it is to think, to open wide your heart and brain and let the echoes of the world repeat themselves therein. Thoughts are not born within us, but they come to us, and when we are in tune with all the world we hear them.

'Tell me,' I asked, 'what is that light I see far over there, beyond the islands, far inland. I seem to see a spurt of fire sometimes.'

'That is the centre of universe.'

'And what is that?'

'The centre spire over the king's throne-room in the palace. It is covered with leaf-gold. You see the sun shining upon it.'

'Where the Queen lived the Cavalier spoke of?'

'Just so, who lost the kingdom.'

'Are you not hard on women?'

'When women rule, men and kingdoms and civilisations are lost,' he answers.

'Then what should women do?'

'Women should reign, men govern.'

'And I, am I to reign?'

'You are,' he says. 'You reign. I am your minister, and govern.'

'Why should that be?'

'Because women are the negative, the conserving force: men are the positive and act restrained by women, but not guided.'

'Oh, oh,' I say, and feel quite angry.

He laughs. 'Ma mie,' he says, 'let us not quarrel yet. Sometimes I think the fight is bound to come, but just now let us enjoy. Look at the children bathing there; are they not beautiful? When I first came to Upper Burma women used to bathe like that.'

'Quite nude?' I cry.

'Just so,' he says.

'Weren't they ashamed?'

'Not in the least, except if they were ugly.'

Shame lies in the beholder's eye. It lay in the eye of Europeans, so the women now wear clothes when bathing.'

'Are you then worse than the Burmese men?'

'It's a matter of custom,' he replies. 'In countries where women do not show their faces, to show the face is immoral. We Europeans do not feel so because we are accustomed to women's faces. But we are not to anything else. Women consist of heads and hands and, perhaps, arms. We know, of course, that there is more, but we pretend it is not so. Therefore when they show that they have more than that, it strikes us with a sense of the unaccustomed. It awakens an immodesty of thought, which is only immodest in that it has not been properly ventilated and used. Secret recesses of the mind and the emotions are full of evil things, and the cure is sunlight and fresh air.

'Therefore, to one properly accustomed to see women's figures, there is nothing immodest in seeing them; they only, if pretty, awaken a sense of beauty and pleasure that the world holds such pretty things.

'And nude children, how beautiful they are. I love to see the children bathing, don't you?'

I think I ought to. If I don't, it is because of something wrong in me, not them, and I will in time,

In the red sunset we come to Sagaing. The river narrows from its three miles width and takes a bend to westward, compressed through a rocky gateway. We pass the steamer ferry and we come close to a shore green with fresh grass shadowed by giant trees. A sand-bank runs out, and here we moor. Mr. and Mrs. Windham come down to meet us, and Mrs. Windham drives me to their house.

How glad I am to be inside a house again. I think I am a cat. I don't like wandering, and I don't like camps. I like a stationary home. I like four walls to shut me in. I like the peace, the rest, the finiteness of *things*.

CHAPTER XV

‘ Women walk through life looking backward, but men
forward.’

GANGLER.

IT was with great interest and curiosity I awaited the arrival of Mr. Gallio and his bride, who had promised to spend their Christmas with us. I had known him for years and liked him. He was a change from other men, all of whom seem to us women the same, or nearly so. He was quite different. He had a marked personality, almost as a child has—as frank and joyous, as easily cast down, as quick in recovering, as tender and confiding and sometimes as rude. You could not count on him as on other men, who are almost as certain as machines. You never knew beforehand what he would say or do—except that it would be the unexpected. Sometimes he would be wrong, but he was quick to see his mistakes, and acknowledge them truly and bravely; and would very often be most right when you thought at first that he was wrong. He was a man of impulse, of generous and nearly always right impulse, of very strong

emotions, of extraordinary knowledge, with an abiding hatred to all convention of thought and sometimes of act.

What would his wife be like, and how would they get on?

Well, when I saw her coming up the bank from the raft to meet us, I saw that as far as looks went he had done well. It wasn't the actual shape of her face and figure that were so striking as her colouring. A strong and vivid light shone through her, that glowed in the colouring of her hair, her clear complexion, that showed itself in her quick motions, the changeful receptiveness of her expression, in the look of her deep-blue eyes.

Directly you saw her you loved her, you wanted to kiss her, to talk to her, to hear her talk. She was like her husband in the way that she too seemed to have kept her child's nature, though she were grown up. The world seemed always new to her and good. As I drove her to our house, she glanced quickly this side and that to take things in, to understand, and she asked questions. She was as full of questions as a child.

'Have you lived here long?' she asked as we drove along the strand under the avenue of trees. 'How beautiful it is, and with the river always before you. My husband loves the river. It seems alive to him, a symbol of all life.'

‘And you?’ I asked.

She shook her head gaily. ‘I am like a cat, I think,’ she answered, laughing. ‘I like houses and civilisation and—and things.’

‘But aren’t you comfortable on the raft?’

‘Quite comfortable, thanks. He got it up so nicely. And we have had such fun. We got shipwrecked. But I will tell you all afterwards. What is this house we are passing?’

‘That is the house your husband lived in for several years.’

‘Oh!’ she said, pursing her mouth and looking at the house curiously. ‘Wasn’t he rather lonely there?’

‘Without you? Of course he must have been.’

She glanced at me merrily. ‘I always think he must have been dreadfully lonely before we married. He likes—being married so much, you know.’

‘And you?’

‘Oh, me?’ with rising inflection. ‘Well, I—what is that other house?’

‘That is the club.’

‘I’m not sure I approve of clubs,’ she said consideringly. ‘And the next?’

‘This is our house,’ I answered, as we drove in, ‘and I hope you will have a happy Christmas here.’

She looked at me gratefully in answer, and when we had both got out she kissed me, just

as a child would do, and said: 'How nice you are!' and laughed. Then my husband and Mr. Gallio drove up, and we went in to tea.

They both of them kept us very much alive the week that they were with us. They were always wanting to do something new, always had something new to say. He wanted her to see the place he had lived so long in, and she wished to see.

He took her out riding with him in the morning, showing her the rides he took so many times alone. He told her which was his favourite ride, and why; he showed her the new road he had made along the cliffs above, and she came back from these morning rides aglow with pleasure. 'I feel that I have got a little into his past life,' she said to me. 'I have lifted a corner of the veil that hung between me and his past.'

Then he took her to the court-house, showed her where he used to sit and hear the cases, his private room where he wrote and worked. But in this she took less interest.

'It belongs,' she said, 'to that part of my husband which the world owns and wants. It is of the judge, the magistrate, the official. All that is nothing to me. When he comes into my house, he leaves outside all that part of himself. I could not understand it, and I do not want to. I think that I am rather afraid of it. I want to be protected from con-

tact with it. He must protect me. You don't know of your husband's official life, do you?' she asked me.

'I don't,' I answered. 'It has nothing to do with me.'

'Yet don't you feel,' she said, 'that somehow it isn't fair. Our husbands know all of us, but we only know a part of them.'

'I am glad of it,' I answered. 'It is that half which we do not know which makes the world safe for us. We are the kernel, they the rind. The kernel sees but the inner lining of the rind, its smoothness and firmness, and its enveloping protective love. The hard, rough outer coat is turned to the world, not us.'

Then she wanted to see the house that he had lived in. 'I want to see it all inside and out, without my husband.'

'And why without me?' he asked.

She wrinkled up her forehead in perplexity. 'I don't know why,' she answered. 'But that is what I want. I think I want to picture you in the rooms. But I couldn't do it if you were with me.'

'All right,' he said.

So I asked Mr. Brookes, who is now in Mr. Gallio's place, to ask us both to tea one afternoon, and she saw the house. He showed all the rooms, and the verandahs back and front, and the garden and the stables. She did not say anything all the while we were going

round, she was only considering. At the end she asked: 'Was it just like this when my husband lived in it?'

'Very much,' Mr. Brookes answered. 'The furniture is nearly the same, and there is little change.'

But when we were going back she said to me: 'I am glad I saw it. A house like that is not a home. It is an office pigeon-hole, where an official is filed when off duty. How glad he will be when I make him a home—a *home*.'

'I do not think,' I ventured to say, 'that men care so much about homes as women do. Their interest lies so much outside.'

She looked at me with a sudden drooping of the corners of her mouth.

'It is all I can give him—all, and he gives so much to me. And you say that he will not care.'

I felt inclined to pet her like a child. 'You give him yourself,' I said.

'But I didn't make myself. I just am. I want to do something, make something for him.'

'My dear,' I said, 'you will find that in life you cannot simply be. You will have to continually remake yourself to get along happily in marriage. I have been married for twenty years, and know.'

'Then I am not satisfactory as I am?'

'You are quite perfect as you are for now.'

But life is change and growth, especially married life. It is growth together.'

'I see,' she said reflectively. 'Thank you. I see.'

Mr. Gallio I found the same as he had always been, yet changed for me. He was not really altered. I could see under the surface he was the same that I had known before, but he was more restrained. He used to say all that he thought—first one thing and then another, as new views struck him. Now he is more silent, more watchful over himself, as if he were conscious he had stepped into a world which was new and strange and not a little difficult. I would notice him often watching his wife with a wonder in his eyes, as if he were trying to know and could not. He wished to understand her. She was his problem, a most delightful problem, which was the more fascinating that it never would be fully solved. Sometimes a sudden light would illuminate his face as some comprehension came to him, and he would laugh.

I was glad for his sake. But for mine I could not help regretting. I was his friend no more in the old sense, his confidant. He kept his secrets to himself. A married man cannot have women friends, and he is mine no more.

On Christmas night the station dined with

us: we were twelve in all, with only four women. The annual Christmas dinner is a ceremony that we cannot omit, and yet I think that it gives us more pain than pleasure. For Christmas is the child's festival, and our children are all at home. They are growing up in ignorance of us, without their mothers, to be strangers to us all their lives. Such is the price we women pay for an empire that to us is nothing. Our homes, our husbands, and our children are our world. To things beyond these confines we are indifferent. We see with microscopic eyes. Our husbands' eyes are fixed on the far beyond. The world sometimes is nearer to them than their homes. A man would sacrifice not only himself but his wife and children to a world's dire need. A woman would sacrifice a world to those she loved.

Yet we did our best. We made speeches and toasted absent friends, and after dinner we played and sang.

Then in a dim corner of the verandah Mr. Gallio came and sat by me.

'Well?' I inquired.

'Yes, it is well,' he answered.

'That is just like you,' I answered. "'Well?'" to most people means a question only. You answer it in a truer sense.'

He only smiled, and we sat in silence for a time.

‘What are we to talk about?’ he asked. ‘We used to have much to say. Have we now nothing?’

‘In the old days,’ I answered, ‘we talked of men and women, of love and what it might mean, of marriage. You were an inquirer into truth and I told you what I could. You used to speculate and form theories and philosophies. Now we can talk no more.’

‘No,’ he replied. ‘In those days I could express my thoughts quite freely because they were vague and personal to no one. They were but generalisations. Now it might not be so. Even if unintentional, there might be a personal reference.’

‘Just so,’ I said.

‘But tell me this,’ he continued. ‘You were married. Yet you could discuss such things. Now I am married I cannot. How is that?’

I shook my head. I had never thought of that, but it is quite true. To a married man, marriage and all connected with it is a secret matter, never to be discussed. With a woman it is not so. Are men more loyal to their wives than women to their husbands, or why?

‘I don’t know,’ I said. ‘What is your explanation?’

‘I haven’t got one. I am so newly married that I do not at all understand it yet. It is just another of those mysterious differences of

sex. A woman will often discuss her husband, kindly, of course: a man will never discuss his wife. I remember now that a Moham-medan will not even mention his wife's name in public, won't put it on the census paper, for instance.'

'Yes, I can understand that,' I said.

'But why, but why?'

'Always at unsolved riddles?'

'I like to solve them. And perhaps it may be that whereas a man is public property a wife is private property.'

'Of her husband?'

'Exactly so.'

I laughed. 'Well, we shall have to go back to our table directly, but before we go let me say how much I admire your wife. She has the quality most essential for a happy marriage a girl can have.'

'And what is that?' he asked.

'She is willing and glad to learn.'

When our guests were leaving us we went out with them on to the river bank. The moon was nearly full. All the world dreamed in silver loveliness and peace. The Gallios detached themselves from us and walked together along the road. He put his arm about her and they passed into the shadows of the trees. My husband came and stood by me.

'Did you see?' I asked.

‘The Gallios?’

‘Yes. What do you think? Will they be happy?’

‘How can one tell? The honeymoon is not waned as yet. Look at the sky.’ And he pointed up at the full moon. ‘What do you think?’

‘I do not know,’ I answered. ‘They are both such strong individualities neither will give way. If they have a quarrel, I wonder if they will ever make it up.’

‘The one in the wrong will give in.’

‘But neither may be wrong. Both may be right.’

‘How can that be?’

‘She may have her woman’s view and he his man’s view. Each may try to make the other see in the same way.’

‘Then they must agree to differ. And after all, isn’t that what marriage is meant for, to reconcile two truths, the male and female, so that they live together in amity and peace.’

‘But will they learn that?’

‘We did.’

‘After what suffering. Have you forgotten?’

He laughed. ‘I have forgotten. We men go through life looking forward, but you women, I think, walk backwards, regarding always the past, don’t you?’

‘Perhaps,’ I said. ‘Are not both sides worth seeing?’

But he only shook his head.

We did not wait. When the Gallios came back I do not know. We went to bed. We have been married twenty years and they a week.

The day after Christmas my husband and three other men, including Mr. Gallio, went out for two days' deerstalking. They did not take us with them because they were going a long ride, and would have but a bare rest-house to put up in.

'Women require so much paraphernalia,' my husband always says. 'They are so dependent on their surroundings that one woman is as much trouble to move as a battalion of men. They want their home moved with them. Like snails they cannot go without their shells.'

So the men set off alone, and Mrs. Gallio was left for me to look after. I am afraid I did not do it very well. I am really too old to be a companion to so young a woman, and Mrs. Gallio abandoned my company for that of Mrs. Sandys.

I am afraid I don't like Mrs. Sandys. She knows either too much or too little—I don't know which. I think that unless a woman can really understand things she had better not know of them. It is not necessary for women to know the world as it is for men.

And Mrs. Sandys since she came out newly married a year ago has made a great many discoveries about men and women, which she giggles and gloats over without understanding. I am sure she has been opening Mrs. Gallio's eyes, and I am vexed because Mrs. Gallio will see things wrongly.

At the club in the evening Mrs. Sandys takes off Mrs. Gallio and keeps her in private conversation for an hour or more. Well, it cannot be helped, but I shall be glad when her husband comes back and assumes charge again. For the girl, even in these two days, has changed, has become thoughtful, less happy, and sometimes a little irritable.

When the men come back we are all going to shoot duck down the river.

CHAPTER XVI

‘These three made the world, and are in all the world,
and keep the world young : the Creator, the Preserver, the
Destroyer—Brahma and Vishnu and Siva.’ *Vedas.*

XVI



RS. GALLIO stood beside me regarding the bullock-cart in which we were to drive from our camp to the lake where the men were going to shoot. She had never been in a bullock-cart before, and she did not quite know if she liked it. Her husband brought a chair and held out his hand.

‘Get up,’ he said.

But she hesitated. ‘That bullock has a wicked eye,’ she complained.

‘No, no,’ he answered. ‘That is not wickedness you see in his eye ; it is bonhomie.’

‘And he wags his tail about in a hasty way instead of letting it hang down straight,’ she added.

‘Sign of a high-strung yet benignant disposition,’ said Mr. Gallio. ‘Well, Mrs. Windham, will you get up first and show my wife the way?’

So I climbed into the cart and sat down on the thick straw put there to act as springs,

and Mrs. Gallio got in beside me. I think her husband likes her pretty nervousness ; it gives him an opportunity to protect and care for her. Really she is brave enough.

Then we set off, the men in front on ponies, four women in carts behind. The ponies tossed their heads and cantered, while our bullocks trotted vigorously.

It was a glorious morning. The air was cool and fresh, and the sun had hardly risen. Our way lay through lanes bordered with hedges. There were blue morning-glories in masses on both sides, and the dew hung on their petals. All the world sparkled with the freshness of the day.

‘Have you ever been to a duck-shoot before?’ I asked.

She shook her head. ‘It is all new to me. I want to see it very much. My husband says I can go to his butt with him.’

I looked at her in seriousness. Should I warn her or should I not? For a few minutes I said nothing, and then it seemed to me that I had better speak. Happiness is so easily wrecked by little things, and she was so young.

‘My dear, I wouldn’t go,’ I said.

She looked at me in surprise. ‘Why not? Do you never go with Mr. Windham? Isn’t it the proper thing to do?’

‘I think that the men would sooner be alone to shoot,’ I said. ‘It is their business,

and not ours. It is their nature to like killing things, but not ours.'

'No,' she admitted.

'And,' I went on, 'men like to be alone sometimes. They like to feel they are free.'

She nodded her head reflectively, thinking.

'You would not want your husband, if you were busy in household affairs.'

'Oh, but this is sport,' she answered.

'Men take their sport quite seriously. Besides—let him go free, my dear, sometimes, let him go free.'

For a time she did not answer, sitting, her hands folded in her lap, her eyes upon the distance. Then suddenly her face lighted up with a bright smile as she turned to me.

'Thank you,' she said.

We passed through little strips of forest, and heard the jungle cocks and partridges crowing their morning call. A hare ran past us in a field, and far off we marked a deer. Then through the trees we saw the shining levels of the lake.

The men had got there first, and were waiting for us at a farmer's house upon the bank, and helped us down. A place had been made for us to rest in and watch the distant shooting, and our servants were bringing breakfast. Our comfort was well provided for.

Then the men went down to their boats, long, narrow canoes hollowed out of single

logs poled by a Burmese boatman from behind, and each went off to his appointed butt built in the bushes and reeds about the lake or on the islands.

We saw the long, lithe skiffs skim over the water, putting up here and there an outlying duck or making the divers disappear, and then they were lost to sight.

So we sat there under the pandal and we waited.

The lake was beautiful under the morning light. It was not a great sheet of open water, but more like a maze of broad and narrow water lanes bounded by lily beds and banks of high and feathered grass and bushes. Upon the banks were forest trees, some with bright scarlet blossoms that shone reflected in the water like sub-aqueous flames. There was no ripple on the lake, for the morning calm had not yet passed and filmy mists still veiled its farther inlets. But the air was full of golden light, and the sky was blue as the ocean is.

It was a scene of peace and quiet, where everything was glad.

Then suddenly there came a shot, another, and many more, and the quietness was broken. There arose a roar and rush as the innumerable geese and duck and teal rose up from the inlets of the lake into the air. The sky was full of startled birds flying hither and thither in startled disorder, and we heard the guns from

all the butts. But presently the birds resolved themselves into companies. The geese in two wedges flew towards the river and the warm sand-banks which they had only left an hour before. The different kinds of duck, pochard and pintail, gadwal and cone duck, the whistling teal, the cotton teal, and others, assembled together and in long skeins flew round the lake seeking a quiet place. We saw the canoes glide out from their hiding-place in the reeds and retrieve the fallen, a hawk would strike at a wounded bird, and then the lake fell back into its quietude. In front of us a diver seated on a dead branch above the water extended its wings to dry in the sun, and the water-hens swam to and fro. The guns had not disturbed them ; they knew that they were safe.

A pied kingfisher came and hovered over the water close by us ; with a splash he dropped and disappeared, then rose again and flew away with a tiny silver fish wriggling in his beak.

Every now and then a wedge of geese or duck or teal would come back from their wanderings or swoop down from the heavens above with a tear of the riven air, and as they passed some butt the gun would go off, and one or two would fall. Then the rest would swerve or would soar again upward.

How fast the wild-duck fly, and their curved wings as they swoop down, how beautiful they are. And how sadly they drop down, suddenly

rendered lifeless, no better than the stones, less beautiful than the weeds about them.

How horrible and terrible is death, that change from a living thing to an inert and huddled heap.

How can men like to deal it out ?

So all the brilliant morning hours the shoot went on. When it was time for lunch, a Burman policeman fired three shots in quick succession from near our pandal to recall the shooters, and in a few minutes we saw them coming back. They were muddy and wet and sunburnt and hot and happy. Their bags were spread out upon the shore and we went to look. But alas, alas ! Were these blood-stained, draggled, and lustreless lumps of feathers the same beautiful duck we had seen fly past ? With their life had gone all their beauty. Their once shining feathers were dull, their wings hung like rags. We did not like to look at them.

Then we had lunch—and how the men ate !

After lunch it was arranged that we should go back to our camp while the men went off to shoot snipe in the rice-fields beyond the lake. They were getting up to go when I saw Mr. Gallio speak to his wife. I didn't hear what he said, but I saw her look up. She shook her head ; he insisted, and she gave way. Then she came over to me.

' Do you want to go back so soon ? ' she asked.

‘Why not?’ I said. ‘The men will not return here. They will go straight back from the fields.’

‘But suppose,’ she said, ‘suppose that there was a man who said he didn’t want to shoot any more, just now, but would take us both in a boat on the lake, would you go?’

I held up a warning finger.

‘I said I did not want to go in a boat,’ she answered, ‘but he said I must.’

‘To that there is no reply,’ I said. ‘Did he say I *must* go with you?’

‘Of course not, but you will?’

I laughed. She was yearning of course to go, but she was afraid she might be doing wrong. She remembered what I had told her. So I said,

‘Very well, we’ll go.’

Mr. Gallio sat in the bows; we sat close together in the middle, and the boatman poled us from the stern. The long canoe glided along with a most pleasant motion, hardly disturbing the water as we passed. We crossed the broad expanse and came to the other side where the islands were, and coasted round them. There were long, open channels that ran up inland between beds of water-lilies and of reeds. Innumerable birds flitted or swam about us, swallows and terns above, coots and grebes in the water. And over the water-lily pads the wagtails ran, dodging and

darting here and there collecting an insect luncheon.

Then we wanted to gather flowers. There were water-lilies of many kinds, red and pink and white, but the prettiest were light blue. So the boatman pushed the boat into a mass of them, and we began to pick. Then Mrs. Gallio stopped, peered earnestly over the side into a tangle of flowers under the bank, and said, 'Hush! look there.'

I looked, but I could see nothing. 'I see a head,' she said, 'and an eye, such a bright eye,' and pointed with her finger.

Then I saw it myself. It was a little teal.

We pulled the boat towards it, hoping to catch it, but just as she reached out it dived.

A moment later it was up again in a little open water, and Mr. Gallio said, 'It's a wounded teal.'

It dived again. But the poor little bird was tired and faint. It could not keep under water; it could not fly. It could only flutter along the surface and we soon caught it.

Mrs. Gallio clasped it with both her hands and lifted it on to her lap. It kicked for a minute and then lay helpless, exhausted, panting, regarding her with a round, bright eye of fear.

'Best let me kill it,' said Mr. Gallio quietly. 'It is wounded and will only die.'

But she indignantly refused, stroking its plumage with one finger. All her mother instinct was up in arms. 'Indeed you shan't. You did your killing this morning, now I will do a little of my saving.' She felt it over with care. 'It has a broken wing.'

So she and I gave it first aid. We bound it gently but firmly in strips torn from Mr. Gallio's handkerchief, so that it could not move. Then we laid it in the basket amid the cool water-plants where it would have shade and solitude.

'What are you going to do with it?' asked Mr. Gallio.

'Nurse it and heal it,' she answered. 'I will get Captain Burn to set the wing this evening. And you like to kill,' she said. 'Why do you always want to kill?'

'Because it is born in us,' he answered.

'Death is such a dreadful thing,' she complained. 'To see a bird, strong, beautiful, and happy, crumple up and fall a lifeless mass of draggled feathers, to see a hare roll over and to hear his scream. How can you men bear to do it? Don't you agree with me, Mrs. Windham?'

'Death is a dreadful thing,' I echoed. 'It is sad to think that, whether shot or not, sooner or later all these birds must die, the hares must die, and we—we too.'

'Yes, we—we too,' she answered, and a

look of fear came to her face. 'Why do all things die? Why is there death at all? Why can't we live for ever?' It seemed as if there came a shadow in the golden light, a chill within the warmth, a fear that marred the glory of the day.

'Why is there death?' asked Mrs. Gallio of her husband. 'Have you a fairy tale that answers that?'

'A fairy tale?' I asked, surprised.

'He says that all the riddles of the world were answered long ago in fairy tales,' said Mrs. Gallio, 'and if the world now still asks the same old questions, it is because they have blinded themselves so that they can neither interpret the fairy tales nor read the world so as to write them afresh.'

I looked at Mr. Gallio and he nodded.

'This too?' I asked; 'this mystery of death, why death should be and what it means—is this explained?'

'It is,' he answered.

'Tell us the fairy tale,' I begged.

He looked half doubtful.

'Ask your husband to tell it us,' I said to Mrs. Gallio.

She glanced and smiled at him, and he laughed back.

'Very well,' he said. 'Only we must be quiet.'

So at his order the boatman poled us to a

shadowed water-nook, where trees hung pendant arms about us and the air was still.

‘I hope it is not sad,’ I asked.

He shook his head. ‘No fairy tales are sad.’

‘Why not?’

‘Because they are true,’ he answered. ‘The unchanging truths that lie below the changing forms of things are ever-beautiful and happy.’

‘Even of death?’ I asked.

‘Especially of death,’ he answered.

‘Please begin,’ I said. ‘May we ask questions if we do not understand?’ I asked of Mrs. Gallio.

‘Yes, yes,’ she said. ‘You ask and I will listen.’ Then to her husband: ‘Please begin.’

He came a little nearer us and sat upon the gunwale, looking down. But his face was rapt, as of one who sees into the inner sense of things. He said:

‘*Tithonus loved the Dawn.*’

‘Who was Tithonus?’

‘Tithonus is every one that ever lived, or will live, all men, all women. Tithonus is you and I.’

‘Why did he love the Dawn?’

‘Do you not love the Dawn?’ he answered. ‘She is the youth of things, when all is beautiful and new; she is our youth, when the world to us is wonderful, lit with the growing light of hope and promise. What does not seem to lie before us in the dawn? She is the youth

of life, the fields in spring, the opening flowers, the song of love-awakened birds. The Dawn has roseate fingers, and all she touches is made young. Do you not love the Dawn ?'

He ceased, and thoughts born of his words possessed my brain, my heart, my soul. At last, 'Go on,' I said.

'Tithonus was afraid of death—Tithonus is you and I.'

He ceased again and let the silence and the fear born of the words tell their own tale.

'He asked the Dawn to give him immortality—Tithonus is you and I.'

Even the water lapping on the boat was stilled. In the deep, golden hush no other sound was heard. His words possessed the silence all alone.

'She gave him what he asked. Tithonus could not die. But he grew old and old—and old—so would you and I.'

I hid my face within my hands. I think that Mrs. Gallio cried down there in the silence. The strain grew tenser.

'The Dawn grows never old. Out of her bath of darkness and of death she rises afresh each morn. The Dawn is not afraid of death; she knows that Dawn is born anew from out the sunset and dark. For life and death are one.'

'What happened to Tithonus?'

'He grew so old he longed for death. Though he had prayed for immortality and got his prayer

he wearied of it. He prayed the Dawn to give him death—and so eternal youth. He felt his immortality lie on him like a curse.—So would do you and I were we immortal.'

'Did she give it him?'

'She could not give him death, because he was immortal. She changed him from a man into a grasshopper.'

'Why that?'

'Because he sings at Dawn. His is the voice of Immortality that sings the hymn of Dawn. Death is the gate of life, the only gate. That is the hymn of Dawn.'

'What is the hymn of Death?' asked Mrs. Gallio.

'The same,' he answered. 'They are one.'

He ceased to speak. The chill and fear had gone—gladness filled the air, the light, the world. I looked up and I smiled.

'Go on,' I said.

'There is no more,' he answered. 'What more would you have? Is it not enough?'

'It is enough,' I answered.

In the evening we went back. The sun had set in a great glory, and the day was done.

So ended our Christmas week. The Gallios left next morning early on their raft.

I am glad they came.

And I hope I shall see them again, for I want to know how that marriage will turn out.

It will be either very good or very bad. Both are so strong, so passionate, and so true, that neither could endure the half-marriage which is the rule. Each will want all—or none. They must be one in soul, or they will be separate. I can see that well enough.

Which will it be ?

CHAPTER XVII

‘Do you measure the water by weight or the corn by the number? Do you hear with the eye or taste with the finger? Can the jeweller judge of the granite or the architect judge of the flower? Then neither can you judge man by woman nor woman by man.’

GANGLER.

XVII

‘**H**ESBIA,’ I said, drawing my chair a little nearer hers, ‘isn’t it jolly to be alone together again?’

She looked at me a little wistfully. ‘Are you sure?’ she asked.

‘Quite sure,’ I said. ‘Why not?’

‘I thought you were glad to be away with other men again, to shoot, to play cards and billiards, to talk your men’s talk.’

‘Oh yes,’ I answered. ‘I like men. But you I love.’

She shook her head. ‘I begin to see that I am only a part of your life,’ she continued, ‘a minor part. You would live your life much the same if I didn’t come into it at all.’

‘I should do my work just the same, if you mean that,’ I answered.

‘And that is the most important part of life?’

‘It must be so,’ I said.

‘So that a wife is only something to play

with when work is done, some one to nurse you if you are sick, to give you children.'

'My wife is my heart,' I said. 'My hands work, my head thinks, but my heart is my life.'

She only smiled again.

'So that to men marriage is an incident, but to women it is all existence.'

'My dear, my dear,' I said; 'I did not make the world and men and women. We must take life as it is, and ourselves as we are, and make the best of them. What is the trouble?'

But she only shook her head. 'I have been thinking,' she said.

'What has made you think now?'

'Before marriage,' she answered, 'I was a girl and could not think. Those first days coming down on the raft I was too bewildered to think. Everything was so new, and events so crowded. When we came to Sagaing I had time to think, especially during those two days you left me to go deerstalking.'

'Should I not have gone? Are you hurt I went? Lesbia, why didn't you tell me you didn't want me to go?'

'I did not mind,' she said. 'It isn't that. But I have been hearing things, and have been thinking and still am thinking.'

'Then give it up,' I said. 'Surrender yourself to pleasure once again. There is always time to think, but not always to enjoy. Ah, take the cash, Lesbia, let the debit go.'

She shook her head. 'I can't help thinking now, and perhaps it is better to get it over.'

'Get what over?'

'There are things I want to understand.'

'Ask me and I will tell you.'

'Presently,' she said.

'Lesbia,' I said urgently, 'don't brood on things. Be open with me always. Tell me what's in your mind; show me your heart. Love lies in telling secrets, every secret thing. Secrecy and love cannot live together.'

'Presently,' she said, 'when I have arranged in my mind what it is I want to know.'

'When will that be?'

'I do not know.'

And more she would not say.

So we floated on.

The river was not so beautiful down here. The mountains on either side had receded far away. It was an undulating and a barren land that we were travelling through. There were fields of cotton and Indian corn and jowar and other crops, but much of the land was waste. Yet the light on it made it beautiful still, and there were villages on the banks.

At noon we stopped for a time at a village I knew well, and no sooner had we stopped than we were invaded.

Old friends of mine knew that I was coming, and had come down to meet me.

There were the headman and elders of the village and the head constable of police and their wives, and there were other women and girls and children. Our little salon was full of people and the fore-castle also.

‘Who are these men?’ asked Lesbia.

‘Old friends of mine,’ I answered. ‘We have done business together and talked together and played together in the old days.’

‘And the women?’

‘They were girls when I knew them first, and used to dance in the village ballet which I got up. Now they are married.’

‘And the girls?’

‘I knew them as children.’

‘And the children?’

‘Their fathers and mothers were friends of mine, and I have known them since they were born.’

Lesbia felt shy and ill at ease. She evidently thought that the visitors’ first object was to criticise her, which she resented. And I don’t think she likes children. Few women do, except their own, while nearly all men adore them. There is something much more akin between a man’s mind and a child’s than between a woman’s and a child’s. Women are more secret, more artificial, I think, while men and children are more frank and open. And that is, I think, why a woman wants to ‘mother’ both.

They all brought flowers and fruit and laid them at Lesbia's feet.

'How nice of them!' she said. 'What do they do it for?'

'They are the eastern's visiting-cards,' I said.

Then we began to talk about old times and friends. They told me who was married and who had died. They discoursed of village affairs. Then the children inspected Lady's family and she allowed them. She did not growl nor show her teeth, but was pleased and proud. Only if one of them lifted up a puppy she whined to say, 'Now do be careful, please.'

The invalid teal was also inspected in his dark corner. He seemed quite comfortable with his arm in splints. He had acquired the name of Bai and was fed with slugs. The women were highly pleased with this evidence of Lesbia's tender heart, and one repeated a rhyme :

Man gives,
Woman receives ;
Man earns,
Woman spends ;
Man wastes,
Woman saves.
Man acts,
Woman bears ;
Man creates,
Woman preserves ;
Man destroys,
 And
Man's word is Yes,
But Woman's word is No.

When I told Lesbia she laughed. 'I must remember it,' she said. 'It is a complete code of marriage in a few words.'

I enjoyed the visit very much, but I think Lesbia was relieved when they all went away and we started again. Although she tries not to show it, I am sure she doesn't like being continually reminded that I lived before we were married. It does not seem fair to her. And anyhow she thinks I ought to begin a new life now.

So after an hour we went on drifting down. It was a glorious afternoon; the air was a bath of light and warmth and joy. But Lesbia was unhappy. She wanted to speak and yet was afraid to speak. And I could not help her. I could only wait with strong foreboding. For a woman is not made to know but to accept. Her relation to life is not such as enables her to understand many things. In the monad, which is a man and woman, nature does not duplicate qualities. What men have women have not, and the reverse. We are complementary and necessary to each, and never competitive. Yet she is ever curious.

We had our tea on the fore-castle while we travelled under a high bank that shaded us. We passed quite close to a herd of buffaloes who were lying in the shallows. They looked at us with frightened eyes, but would not

move their great ungainly bodies. Then we drifted out into a long reach down which the sun was setting. It was one of the most wonderful displays I ever saw. There were thin bars of cloud across the sunset, and as the sun went behind them they glowed with intensest gold, while the sky was like an emerald sea. And when the sun had set all turned to a crimson glow that throbbed with the passion of the dying day.

Then along the fields the evening mist unfolded like lawn veils that earth drew over her to hide her sleep.

And Lesbia looked at it with troubled eyes.

So in the evening hush I drew close up to her and said, 'Tell me now what is it?'

I took her hand and stroked it, but she withdrew it. She found it hard to speak, but at last she nerved herself and said :

'I want to know—to know.'

'Yes, what?'

She found it hard to say, but at last she found a way.

'A girl is the Sleeping Beauty till her Prince comes.'

I nodded.

'Yes, it is true,' she said. 'I know. But I want to know—about a man.'

'What about us?'

'Who is it wakens you?'

'We never are in the garden like you are.'

‘But as boys.’

‘Well, of course. But we waken slowly.’

‘Through women?’

‘Partly so, and what we are told and feel.’

‘What women?’

I did not answer.

‘Was it to meet some of them that you and the Cavalier went after your dinner in the “Boul Mich”?’

‘Oh,’ and I laughed, ‘I thought you were asleep.’

‘I heard you quite well, though I was nearly asleep,’ she said with dignity. ‘Was it?’

‘Maybe it was, maybe it wasn’t,’ I answered.

‘You are ashamed to answer,’ she affirmed.

‘Not in the least,’ I replied.

‘Then why don’t you?’

‘Because you have no right to ask.’

‘No right? Am I not your wife?’ and she flushed. Evidently she was getting angry.

‘You were not my wife then.’

‘I don’t think I would ever have been your wife if I had realised,’ she said gravely.

‘I can’t help that,’ I said cheerfully. ‘I didn’t bring you up to enter into a contract in ignorance of what you were doing. Don’t blame me. Blame yourself.’

‘We girls come to you innocent and pure, but how do you come to us?’

‘Oh!’ I said; ‘is that the trouble?’

She nodded.

‘Men are not women,’ I answered. ‘We have to do the work of life in life. We could not do it did we live in the garden of Eden.’

‘That is an excuse.’

‘It is true,’ I answered.

‘You are not ashamed of it?’ she cried.

‘Most certainly not.’

‘Nor of the misery and sin it causes?’

‘There is no misery nor sin in what is natural and inevitable. The sin lies in laws and conventions which deny facts and so create misery.’

‘If you were ashamed,’ she said slowly, ‘I would forgive. But if you are not, what am I to do?’

‘Lesbia,’ I said, ‘I cannot explain things, for you would not understand. You must take my word for it. Men are not like women. What is good for you is not good for us.’

‘That is only an excuse.’

‘It is no excuse, but a truth,’ I said. ‘I am not in the habit of excusing myself.’

‘How much better women are than men,’ she said.

‘That is not true either,’ I answered.

‘If we did as you do, what would you think of us?’

‘Each follows his or her nature.’

‘Then how much higher a woman’s nature is.’

‘There is no higher nor lower in nature,’ I replied. ‘Nature has her ways to her own ends. If man is man and woman is woman, there is a reason for both.’

Lesbia did not answer, but I could see that she was flushed and angry.

‘Lesbia,’ I said softly, ‘forget it all, my dear. Come and be happy once again.’

‘I will not,’ she burst out. ‘I think it is dreadful. Now that I realise it I shall never feel the same to you again.’

‘Judge not that ye be not judged,’ I said.

‘What do you mean?’ And she faced me.

‘The standards in women and men are different,’ I replied. ‘We do not measure you by our standards. You would fail.’

‘What standards?’

‘We men have standards,’ I said, ‘you know nothing of. We are broad-minded, we get on with other men, we do not judge them. We are brave to meet danger and overcome it, to go out into the world, and we are truthful.’

‘And are not women?’

‘No,’ I said; ‘compared with men, women are narrow, are ignorant, are spiteful and petty, are cowards, and are most untruthful.’

‘How dare you?’ she cried. ‘Do you mean that we tell lies?’

‘Not necessarily that, but you will say that a thing is true which you know nothing

of, whether it be really true or not. You will repeat as true what is only hearsay, and bad hearsay at that. You prefer to believe evil of another rather than good. You will bear false witness. In courts it is notorious how untruthful women are. You are unscrupulous, and you don't know what honour is. There is not a woman in a hundred who, if she were suddenly to become a man, and continued to act as a woman, would be accepted in any club or service or company of men at all.'

She jumped up before me, her face scarlet with rage.

'Why did you marry a woman if you thought they were like that?' she cried.

'Men marry women because they are totally unlike men. If women were like men, we should never marry. Why should we?'

'But if they are worse. If they are untruthful and——' she was becoming almost speechless in her rage.

'I did not say women were so. Women are women, and there it ends and we accept it. I said that if women claimed to judge men by women's standards then men would rightly claim to judge women by men's standards, and if so judged you would be all I said. But we do not judge you by our standards. We do not judge you at all. We know it is your nature and accept it as such. There is no doubt some

good reason for it. And we love you.' I rose and stood beside her trying to comfort her, for she was in tears.

'You insult not only me but all my sex,' she cried.

'And you? Did not you insult mine?'

'No,' she cried.

I was silent, looking at her.

'If I did,' she said at last, 'you deserved it.' I did not answer.

She was panting with rage, her bosom heaved, her hands were tightened into fists. She looked at me with eyes of passionate reproach. And then she ran away into her bedroom.

The night was almost come by now, and presently the raftsmen went ashore with the mooring ropes and drew us in. I sat and smoked, and thought of Lesbia there within. Had I been brutal and unkind? When I thought of her misery, I reproached myself. Then the reaction came. If we are to be happy in married life we must face it on equal terms. How many men have I known who pretended to humble themselves to save a scene, who acted the hypocrite before their wives? They paid for it afterwards. They lost their own respect and their wives' respect and never regained either. How could they? When a man is ashamed of his sex, will he gain the

respect of the other? Whatever I did I would never pretend.

But, poor girl, poor girl!

The dinner was silent. To save appearances when Po Chon was in, she spoke a sentence now and then in a choked voice. And when dinner was over she worked at some needlework sitting in the salon. I sat outside, and Spot and Lady came and licked my hand. How quickly dogs understand when you are in trouble.

I sat outside alone. And I remembered that other night not long ago, that began as this did in a quarrel and ended in happiness. But a spiritual fight is more bitter, more hard, than any physical fight. She came not near me.

So I sat out till the dawn came, with Lady in my lap.

CHAPTER XVIII

‘Lo, the water is soft ; it gives to the touch, yet will you mould the hardest steel sooner than it. Water is the most stubborn of all things, for it cannot learn, but returns always to its bed.’

GANGLER.

XVIII

IN all my life I never felt so happy as I did a week ago, and in all my life I never felt so miserable as I do now. I did not know any one could be so unhappy as I am. There seems nothing left to me. My old world, my happy, careless girl-world, of which mother was the centre, I left for him. I came into his world and made of him my centre, and now that has fallen into ruins. I loved him—now I hate him. He has hurt me more than if he had beaten me with a stick ; my body would recover from a bruise, but what will heal my spirit ?

Oh dear ! Oh dear !

I would like to flee away somewhere and never see him again. It hurts me to see him, to hear him.

To go in to dinner with him is a martyrdom.

Now all is silent save the gurgle of the river in the logs. I neither see nor hear him—yet he is ever present with me. My closed eyes

see him sitting outside and smoking, and presently I will hear him go to bed just there beyond the curtain.

What am I to do ?

How can I live with him for years and years ? I don't think that if I had realised that men were like this I would ever have married. How dared he ! Oh, how dared he say what he did about us ! And it isn't true that women are like that. At least I don't think it is *all* true. We are not quite so bad.

How long the night is. It seems weeks since I came to bed. And is he never going to bed at all ? Does he despise me so much that he doesn't want to be near me even with a curtain between ? What a disappointment marriage is. I wonder if he is as disappointed as I am ?

What am I to do ?

I am sure it isn't good for him to be sitting out there in the cold like that all night. He must hate me very much.

I wish I didn't feel so hot. My head is burning, and though I keep turning the pillow over and over it isn't any use, as it is hot on both sides now.

I wonder if he has left me, gone off in the boat, perhaps, because he doesn't want any more of me, because I am a woman and women are,

in his opinion—all the things he said they were. Very likely he has. It is just the sort of thing he would do, he is so passionate. And I shall find a letter with breakfast and money to pay my passage home. I heard some sounds an hour ago—that was he going.

I sit up on my bed terrified. What shall I do? My heart beats. No! I hear him move in the salon and speak to Lady. What a relief!

How I do hate him!

Was it manly to say what he did?

In all my life I never did so much thinking as this night. My head just spins out thoughts on top of each other. But mainly it is the same thought over and over again. I am tired of it. I have quite settled what to do in future. I am married to him, and there are the *convenances* to be considered. I won't have people pitying me or him and saying 'another unhappy marriage.' I shall nerve myself to behave to him in future with cool courtesy. But oh! what a mockery it will be.

II

I went to bed just at dawn as quietly as I could, hoping that Lesbia was asleep and would not hear me. But I heard from beyond the curtain something between a choke and a sniff, and knew she was awake.

How I would have loved to go in and comfort her. But it would only have made matters worse. I expect she hates me and thinks that I hate her. I love her more than ever, dear little Pharisee. But is there anything that causes us such pain to get rid of in after life as the Pharisaism that is so carefully driven into us as children?

Well, I suppose I had better lie down in bed, though I don't feel much inclined to sleep, and in less than an hour Po Chon will bring the tea. Even now I hear the raftsmen preparing to unmoor.

III

It is after breakfast.

I am talking to Ma Mie, the girl who is Po Ka's wife. I wanted some one to talk to, some companion in the misfortune of marriage, so I sent for her.

It was an awful breakfast—stone cold. I suppose really the dishes were hot, but nothing seemed so. As to him, I could hardly bear to look at him. He actually behaved as if nothing had happened. I supposed he would be ashamed to meet me, but he wasn't. He came in just when breakfast was on the table and said 'Good-morning, Lesbia!' but he did not kiss me at all. He did not dare to offer to. He smiled and

talked just the same as usual, but I saw that his smile I used to like so much is only a hollow mockery covering a hardened heart. If he had really felt sorry, he would not have eaten that extra helping of curry. I couldn't. Such are men, quite brazen.

So I send for Ma Mie, and I talk to her with the help of my Madrassee ayah. She looks bright and happy, very different to the miserable little girl of that night of the conference ten days ago. I suppose she is really too ignorant to understand, and that is why she is able to bear it so well.

'How old are you?' I ask.

'Seventeen,' she answers.

'Isn't that very young to marry?' I ask.

She shakes her head, surprised. 'Oh no. It just depends. Some girls marry at sixteen, some not till nineteen or even twenty sometimes. It depends.'

'What does it depend on?' I ask.

'On when she falls in love,' she answers, looking at me with open eyes of wonder at my question.

What an extraordinary idea to think that the ability to fall in love shows a maturity for marriage. 'But you may be wrong in falling in love,' I answer. 'At so early an age you can't know your own mind.'

'It isn't your mind that falls in love,' she answers.

I begin to find it more difficult to talk to her than I expected. She has such funny ideas.

‘Hasn’t a girl out here got a mind?’ I ask.

‘Oh yes,’ she answers, ‘but the use of the mind is to make the best of love when it comes. It can’t alter it, or create it, or kill it—at least that is what the elders say.’

The use of the mind is to make the best of things it can’t control! Poor girl. How badly she has been brought up in this pagan land.

‘So,’ I say, ‘when you have fallen in love it’s best to marry?’

‘Generally,’ she says; ‘of course there are exceptions. Isn’t that the way with the Thakinmas?’ she asks shyly.

‘No,’ I answer. ‘We subordinate love to judgment.’

She simply stares and says nothing. It makes me feel uncomfortable, so I go on. ‘We think it better not to marry till much later. I am nearly twenty-one, and I am considered very young to marry.’

‘It is different with us,’ she says simply. ‘The elders say that a girl goes into a man’s life, and if she is to be happy there she must go in young.’

‘Who are the elders,’ I ask, ‘priests?’

But the ayah can’t translate this, because she says that in Burma there are no priests.

That accounts for the awful state of this child's mind. I find it more difficult than I expected talking to her. Outside I hear him whistling. He is quite happy, though his poor wife is miserable. What is a wife to him? He despises women.

'Your husband Po Ka was married before?' I ask. 'Don't you mind?'

'Why should I mind?' she answers.

There again.

'Don't you mind about what your husband did before?'

'I love him as he is. What have I got to do with the past?' she asks. 'The elders say it is bad to look at the past, your own or others. Make all you can of the present and the future.'

I wonder why there are not more missionaries sent out to this poor benighted country. I shall subscribe when I get home.

'If he is a good husband to me, that is all I want,' she continues.

'Suppose he isn't?'

Her face lights up. 'I will make him so,' she says. 'We have a proverb, "Good wives make good husbands."''

'And if you weren't a good wife?'

'He could divorce me.'

'Do you mean to say,' I ask aghast, 'that he can divorce you for no reason?'

'Not for no reason, but if we were very

unhappy together he could divorce me, or I could divorce him. But I will never want to divorce him, and I will never let him want to divorce me.'

This horrifies me. What a terrible degradation of marriage to allow divorce for mere unhappiness. Why there would be continual divorces in England.

'I suppose,' I ask the ayah, 'that divorce is very common among these people.'

'Oh no, ma'am,' she answers, 'it is not common at all. A divorce is a great misfortune, and both husband and wife study each other very carefully, so that it very seldom comes to that. Besides, the elders will not grant a divorce unless they see the case is hopeless.'

'With us,' I say, 'marriage is a more beautiful and sacred thing than that. When we marry, it is for life and we cannot be separated.'

'Not even if you quarrel so that both are always miserable?' asks Ma Mie.

'No. We just make the best of it.'

'To make the best of it would be to end it, I think,' says Ma Mie simply.

It horrifies me that people should have such dreadfully materialistic ideas about marriage and take it merely as a worldly association and not as a sacrament; so I say reverently, 'With us marriage is more than an association. It is a vow before God which cannot be broken.'

She looks at me questioningly. 'If your God sees that with the best will in the world you cannot keep your vow and that it would be better for yourselves and for the children also that you be divorced, does He never let you off?'

'Never,' I say decisively.

'I am glad we haven't got a God like that,' she answered with a sigh of relief.

Evidently there is no good talking. Her mind must have been warped as a child to have such ideas.

'So that,' continued Ma Mie, 'if you are once married that settles it?'

'Just so,' I say.

'The elders tell us,' she returned, 'that marriage is a continual effort of both husband and wife to understand the other, and that if on either side this stops then real marriage ends. I couldn't go on living with a man unless we loved each other.'

'Not if you were married?' I ask.

'Unless we loved each other we wouldn't be married. It would be only a pretence. I would sooner die,' she says, flushing up, 'than live on with a man and quarrel with him. It would be awful, and so bad for the children.'

'But,' I say, 'suppose you can't help it?'

'The elders say,' she answered, 'that you can help it. If you begin with love, then you can make understanding come if you will, if both sides try.'

‘But if only one side try?’

She looks at me and shakes her head. ‘The elders never told me about that.’

‘What do you think about it yourself?’ I ask.

‘I am very young,’ she answered, ‘and do not know much yet. But I think, I think——’

‘What do you think?’

She shook her head. ‘I can’t think yet. But the elders say that the happiness of marriage lies usually in the wife’s power.’

Well, well, I think it is very sad.

Then Ma Mie and the ayah go away and I am alone again. I take up my work and remain in the salon.

Outside I hear him talking to Po Chon.

And I begin to wonder about him. Having lived so long with these people, I dare say he has become infected with their ideas. Perhaps he doesn’t fully realise that he is married for life and will have to make the best of it as it is. I dare say he is expecting me to try and understand him and his man’s ideas. I have no intention of doing any such thing. I am an English-woman and a Christian, and he can’t divorce me because I won’t give in to him. My ideas are right and I intend that they shall prevail. Men are a very bad lot and it is wonderful that any of us care to marry them. We generally regret it, I am sure. The very least they can do is to acknowledge our greater spirituality and give way to us.

However, it is done now, and I have to make the best of it. I shall do that by being always courteous and cool to him and keeping up appearances. If he likes to confess his wickedness, I will forgive him, but otherwise my womanly dignity will bear me up.

Oh! my heart feels as if it would break.

How am I to bear the rest of the day? I have a good mind to go and lie down.

No, that would look as if I were afraid of him. I am not afraid of him at all. I shall just go out and sit in the verandah and read a book. There are a lot of books on the shelves; I will take one, it doesn't matter which.

IV

I was talking to Po Chon when Lesbia suddenly came out. I don't know how she managed it, but she made her skirts rustle like a lot of feathers all stuck up. She was very slow and deliberate in her movements, looked at the view, remarked casually, to the surrounding atmosphere, not to me, that the raft was a long way from land, and sat down in her chair. Then she opened her book and began to read. I ventured a remark that we were approaching the junction with another great river, the Chindwin, but she only raised her eyebrows and

said 'Indeed!' in a very distraught tone. She was too deeply interested in her book to talk.

But she didn't read very fast. In ten minutes she had not turned over a page. The book was evidently very absorbing to contain so much in one page, and so I got up on some pretence and passed behind her so as to see the title. It was Sir Oliver Lodge on *The Theory of Electrons*, a book I had wrestled with and at whose hands I had suffered defeat.

'Have you got an amusing book?' I asked casually, as I sat down again.

'Very, thanks,' hardly looking up.

'Merry little things, electrons, aren't they!' I continued, 'and Sir Oliver Lodge writes about them with a gay and sprightly humour.'

She started, gave a glance at the back of the book to see the title, and then blushed furiously. For a few moments she held her ground, then finding the position untenable she got up stiffly. But as she went she fired a parting shot:

'I have always been very *interested* in electrons,' she said with choked dignity, and disappeared.

v

At last the day has gone. I wonder how many hours there were in it—about a hundred I should say. And it's only *one* day. What a long, long thing marriage is.

I have come to bed early, but although I am dead tired I can't sleep yet—or rather, I don't want to.

I wonder if he is ever going to bed at all. I left him working at some law books. What stupid things men amuse themselves with.

I wish he would come to bed. Perhaps he would look in on the way.

If he would only ask me to forgive him, I am quite ready to forgive, and all the wrong is on his side.


Well, I can't keep awake any more. It's past eleven o'clock. If he wants to be forgiven, he can wake me up. Even then, though I hate being woke up, I will still forgive him. I will be the perfect wife whatever he may be.

CHAPTER XIX

‘Those who roam to find the God that dwells within
them are like the shepherd who seeks for the sheep he has
under his arm.’

Vemana.

XIX

ND so we drifted on day after day. As we passed from north to south, the air grew warmer and damper. The freshness and the brilliance of the atmosphere in the upper country were going fast, it was more languid and more tedious. But the moral atmosphere grew colder and greyer. It was a perpetual English December. From Lesbia there radiated all the day a cold politeness like winter sunshine, fictitious and without warmth—and there were frosts at night.

We passed slowly down past many places I knew: Sameikkon, where a broker lived, who disappeared, was drowned, was buried, and rose again; Myingyan, where the famine was so bad; Pakokku, where the Chindwin, a great river in itself, joins.

I knew very well that Lesbia expected me to apologise. She thought that I had abused women, or rather she chose to think so. I had hoped that when her first anger was

passed she would think soberly of what I had said, and that I had not abused women at all. I had said that they would make very bad men, but that as women they were adorable. I think that it is the weakness, physical and mental, of women that appeals to us as our strength does to them. But in reality women are not weak, either physically or mentally. We each have our own strength different from that of the other. Thus men are strong muscularly to do and dare, but they are weak to bear. They cannot cheerfully bear pain or discomfort as women can. We revolt and try to mend matters, sometimes making them worse; women submit more cheerfully and bravely to the inevitable.

And so it is with the brain. We see big and far, and generalise. They see small, and deal with each matter on its merits, without reference to its generalisations. They argue falsely and absurdly when they try to generalise; we often do the same in individual matters, because no generalisation will exactly fit any occurrence.

Therefore men cannot make a home, they see too big; and women cannot make a state, they see too small. That is why nature, which is God, unites them in marriage, so that one sight complements the other sight, one brain the other brain. When both recognise this, all is well. The difficulty for each is to refrain

from trying to convert or tyrannise over the other. I often catch myself unconsciously doing so, and maybe I do so sometimes and do not recognise it. We each want victory. Really the trouble with Lesbia was not what I had said at all, but that she had made a desperate bid for victory and supremacy in marriage. I suppose at one time or another every woman does this. And woe to the man who submits. *Quem Deus vult perdere prius in potestatem mulieris qualiscumque ponit.*

And because I would not submit to it Lesbia was sulking now. I suppose that women are like that; they cannot live and let live as men do, they must either rule or obey. And no doubt nature knew what she was about when she made women like that. But what was to be the end I could not see.

She was very industrious at some needlework, which was, I believe, to be a waistcoat for me, and which she worked at because it showed that she would allow nothing to affect her duties as an admirable wife—at a distance. She consulted the cook and Po Chon about the housekeeping, and took quite an interest in the oil-wells. She had given up Sir Oliver Lodge and his electrons, and was reading instead a book of Loti's, not I think that she cared for it, but because being married now she had a right to read anything she liked, and she wanted to demonstrate her liberty.

In fact her life had become a perpetual demonstration, a demonstration hostile to me. And the overtures I made were received with a cold east wind of surprise that nipped them in their tender bud.

It would have been laughable if it hadn't been so serious and so miserable. I couldn't help but smile sometimes, yet when I did she regarded me with pathetic horror, much as she would a chief mourner who laughed at a funeral. She herself had the air of a martyred saint who endures with heavenly fortitude the tortures of a brutal world.

When we came near the old city of Pagan, I asked her if she would like to spend the day there.

'What is there to see?' she asked.

I said that there were the remains of an old capital of many hundred years ago.

'Houses and palaces?' she asked.

'Mainly pagodas,' I replied. 'Palaces were built of wood, and houses of bamboo and thatch, so that they quickly disappeared; the pagodas were built of brick and stone.'

'What use is a pagoda?' she asked.

'None. They are just waste.'

'Of no use? Are they not temples?'

'No,' I said. 'A pagoda is a reproduction in more or less fancy style of Buddha's tomb. They put them up to his memory.'

'A gruesome way of remembering,' she said.

‘Not worse,’ I said, ‘than a crucifix or cross.’

‘Mors janua vitæ,’ she repeated.

‘True,’ I replied, ‘but it is the life we should cultivate and remember, not the death.’

She sighed.

‘Well,’ I said, ‘shall we spend a day at Pagan?’

‘It is as you like,’ answered the ‘perfect wife.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘that won’t do. If you don’t want to stop, say so. I have been to Pagan many times. I don’t care to go again unless it would give you pleasure. If it would do so, it will give me pleasure too, if not, then not.’

This annoyed her. Her cue was to be submissive in appearance, to accept everything, to express no opinions or wishes, an attitude which had the advantage that it left her free to criticise everything, to make the worst of everything, and then to silently throw the blame on me for every failure.

I was either to acknowledge now and for the future that I was a reprobate, that mankind was in essence bad and in every way inferior to women, or she would make my married life a misery. She knew and felt her power, that in the home the woman is omnipotent and the man cannot fight against her, her own instincts forbid him and disable him, and Lesbia intended to misuse that power.

Women are like that always, I suppose, at first. They are taught nothing ; great power comes into their hands on marriage, and how should they use it rightly ? It is not in human nature that they should. She saw very well how unhappy she made me, and she secretly gloried in it, because it was evidence of her power, and she could always comfort herself by thinking that I alone was to blame. Even her own suffering pleased her. In many women there is a delight in being a martyr. Their very suffering sanctifies the cause. The more they suffer the better their cause *must* be. So do they reason.

Well, well, I could only wait and hope and do my best.

‘Do you wish to stop or not ?’ I asked.

‘We had always arranged to stop,’ she answered, attempting now to throw the onus on a previous plan.

‘No doubt. But we can alter that.’

So that did not do. She must find something or some one else to bear the weight.

‘If we don’t go,’ she said, ‘people will wonder. Pagan is a famous place.’

‘What does it matter ?’ I answered. ‘We can’t regulate our lives by the wonder of other people, but by what we want or don’t want.’

Her temper was visibly rising. She had determined never to express a wish or an opinion again, but to suffer all things ‘gladly,’

and to be driven from this intrenchment and made to express a wish would mean defeat.

‘I really don’t mind,’ she said defiantly.

‘All right. That means you’d sooner go on. I’ll tell the raftsmen.’

But I had only just risen to go when Lesbia said :

‘I think that Po Chon wants to stop.’

‘What for?’ I asked.

‘There are no fowls, nor eggs, nor fish,’ she said.

How ingenious Lesbia was. She was longing to see Pagan, of which she had heard so much, but she would sooner die than depart from her determined attitude of passive meekness. She would not express a desire or take any responsibility. So it had to be put on Po Chon.

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘to gratify Po Chon we will stop the day at Pagan.’

We did, and had a pleasant time. The modern village on the river is some way from the ancient city, which lies on a barren plain. The seasons must have greatly altered since this city flourished, for now there is no drinking-water even for a village there. Indeed all over upper Burma there are many signs of this change. The rainfall now of Pagan is only twelve inches yearly, falling in a few heavy showers; there must have been thirty or forty inches then at least.

We drove out to the old city in a cart drawn by trotting bullocks, and saw all the chief pagodas. Lesbia ran about, and in the excitement and pleasure forgot her grievances. Her sunny nature burst out from beneath the clouds in which she had enveloped it.

‘Look at the carved figures,’ she cried. ‘What is it all? What are those various scenes one after another on these tablets?’

‘Scenes in the life of Gautama,’ I said.

‘Tell me the story.’

I told her, following the carved scenes round the great pagoda.

‘Here he is a prince,’ I said, ‘and here he is married to Yathodaya, and here he becomes aware that death is in the world and will some day take the prince himself, and he is afraid.’

Lesbia looked serious.

‘Here he is leaving his palace and his wife, renouncing all things in the search.’

‘It was not right to leave his wife,’ cried Lesbia.

‘No,’ I said, ‘but such are religions.’

‘What did he find?’ she asked.

‘He found an answer to a negative in a greater negative, to death in Death.’

‘That is no answer.’

‘No,’ I said, ‘but it is all religions have.’

So we went on and saw the whole of his life and of his teaching. *Doka aneitsa, anatta* sums it all.

On the way back Lesbia began to recover herself, or rather to conceal herself again. Her laughter died, she became stiff and cold.

And once on board the raft again the clouds returned even worse than ever. I was not to suppose because she ran about and enjoyed herself at Pagan that I was forgiven. Her very enjoyment was simply to please me. She would never forgive me, never, unless I begged for it. Then as a good wife she would pardon but not forget to put on clothes of superiority as permanent attire. Meanwhile she had relapsed into the 'patient Grizel.'

We were just in time for tea, and she was most solicitous that the tea should be made exactly as I like it—I am rather particular as to my tea—and that everything should be perfect. She discussed with me the antiquities of Pagan with an interest feigned to please me, and very openly feigned. I was to be tamed and subdued by kindness and attention like Bai. Only that Bai had refused to be tamed and had escaped that morning, 'horrid, ungrateful bird,' preferring death to slavery.

After tea a lacquer-worker came on board.

'Would you like to see some lacquer?' I asked Lesbia.

She was interested in the work, and indeed it is curious.

The ordinary lacquer-bowls and boxes are

made on a foundation of plaited bamboo, but the finest have a frame of horsehair.

The colours are red and green and black and the designs are beautiful. When she had admired, I said :

‘Which would you like?’

Her interest changed into indifference.

‘I don't think I want any,’ she said. ‘I can't afford it.’

‘But I will give it you,’ I answered.

‘Thank you,’ she said, ‘but I do not think it would be useful for any purpose. Some other time, perhaps.’

‘We shan't be at Pagan some other time,’ I objected. ‘How would you like this box? It would do to put collars in.’

‘I have a collar-box, thanks all the same,’ she said with perfect courtesy, ‘and my dressing-case is rather too full for another.’

So! She would not accept a present from me; but I only laughed.

‘Very well,’ I said, ‘I will buy it for my own collars.’

Then the raft was unmoored and we went on again for a couple of hours before the dark. At dinner she asked if it was very long before we would come to another station. She inferred that she was dull, but did not say so. And after dinner she wrote letters home with ostentation. ‘At least,’ her attitude declared, ‘I have some friends who are

reasonable people, and marriage is not everything to me.'

At night there was a frost.

So we went on with a golden sun outside and a moral fog within. We passed the derricks on the hills where they bore for oil. It seems that whereas water-wells are in valleys, oil-wells prefer the crests of hills. We passed the mud volcanoes of Minbu.

I don't know how many days we took ; it seemed a young eternity passed in an arctic region of perpetual frost and snow.

It may really have been three days.

And there seemed every day less and less chance of any change. Her attitude instead of altering for the better grew worse. That she was suffering I could see quite well, but that did not soften her. Indeed it hardened her, for at every pang she said to herself, 'His fault, his fault,' and visited on me her great unhappiness. We grew farther and farther apart each hour, each day, each night. She had persuaded herself that she was utterly in the right.

My heart fell lower and lower. I had often wondered before, when I saw husband and wife drifting apart—as I have seen so often—how in the intimacy of marriage it could happen. I saw now that it was that very intimacy that caused it, because my constant presence was a constant irritation to her, so that she never had

time to think or reason calmly about the cause. A sore had been established and my presence, no matter what I did, rubbed the sore and kept it open day and night. And now I understood how marriages can become what they so often are, a misery. Our only chance seemed a separation and to begin afresh. But that could not be done.

When we passed the fort of Minhla, where the old frontier was and where the first fight of the war occurred in 1885, the outside weather began to change. A heavy bank of clouds came down from the north-east, and I saw that we were in for one of those rare winter rains, which are heavy and are cold and uncomfortable in proportion to their unseasonableness. Therefore, instead of stopping as usual just before sunset, I thought it better to try and make Thayetmyo that night, so that if the rain became heavy and long we should have the comfort and society of a station.

We drifted on and on down the leaden surface of the river. In the west an angry light behind the clouds was all we could see of the sunset. Then a fitful wind began to blow, and almost without warning the rain-storm swooped on us from the left bank.

It shut us in within a small grey circle of fast waning twilight. We could not see the banks nor even fifty yards ahead. We seemed alone out on an illimitable water-plain. Now

that we could not see the banks we seemed quite stationary, yet we drifted we knew not where.

And the roar of the rain beating upon the river filled our ears.

Then suddenly there came another sound, the rhythmic beat of paddles. It was a steamer coming up. Soon we could see the flare of searchlights that she had opened to seek her way with through the drift and dark. She was coming round the bend. And a moment later she was upon us. She loomed up out of the rain and gloom like a dark moving mass with a brilliant eye in front. The eye fell upon us.

I leapt to the oars in the bow to try and pull the raft away towards the bank, and the crew came rushing forward to join me. We pulled for all we were worth. We heard the steamer give a frightened hoot from her siren, her engines stopped. But it was no use. I saw she was running us down. Then I jumped up to go to Lesbia, slipped on the round, wet logs, and heard a crash as the steamer struck the raft. The logs divided and threw me into the water, and by some instinct I dived down. I went down and yet down to escape her paddles till I could dive no more, and then I rose. It seemed an age before I reached the surface.

When I came up, I found myself alone. All round me was grey water and above the

night was shutting down. Through the rain and mist I could see the glare of the steamer's light apparently far off. I thought of Lesbia—where was she—how could I help her—save her; of Po Chon, Po Ka, the crew. All had disappeared. I called and called, but there was no answer. I could not swim towards her, for in all this waste of water I did not know where she was. Neither could I swim to land, for I did not know where in the darkness the land lay. I could only keep afloat. And at last I found two logs still fastened together and climbed up on them. They made but an uneasy seat, and of course my legs were in the water; but it was better than swimming.

And so I went drifting down the river. I grew colder and became quite numb. There seemed no help for me. Well, if Lesbia were drowned, what did it matter if I drowned too. And if Lesbia were about to become a second Mrs. Tournon, why should I care to escape?

I did not care. Let what would come, come.

CHAPTER XX

‘You may get oil by pressing sand; you may find water in the mirage; you may find a horn upon a hare; but nothing this side of death will win over the mind of a stubborn woman.’

BHARTEE HARI.



How miserable the last few days have been. He does not show the least repentance yet for being a man. Yet I should have thought all men would have recognised how bad they were and been ready to admit it. I would if I were a man. I would have adored and admired and imitated women. He, on the contrary, despises us. I said to him just now, 'I don't see why you should think women are inferior to men in intellect. Look at the famous women there have been.' And I mentioned to him names of women notable in literature and art and science and medicine. I have seen these names in the papers. He ought to have at once seen how wrong he was and given in, but he didn't. What he said was: 'There are exceptions to every rule. The very scarcity of the exceptions proves how general the rule is on the other side.' 'Oh,' I answered, 'but that is only because we women have no chance. Men

won't allow us any because they are jealous we might best them.' And again he only laughed. That is his invariable answer when he is beaten in argument. He laughs.

'Those women you mention,' he went on, 'are as much representative of the brain of your sex as the bearded women are of its appearance fortunately. Were they the rule instead of the exception the world would soon come to an end. Man doesn't marry his rival but his complement.'

'Well,' I answered, 'when we are properly free and educated we shall be happier thus and won't want to marry.'

'Neither would men,' he answered, 'but nature has decreed otherwise. She wants babies, you see.'

That is the way he talks now. He is dreadfully downright and rude, and it is no use appealing to his reason, because he hasn't any. He is all made up of prejudices. He won't allow women any good qualities. He can't see that, except physical strength, women have all the good qualities and men have none. If they succeed better than women, it is because in a bad world bad qualities are most useful. They are suited to a bad world, but we are too good for this world and won't be really appreciated till we get to heaven.

'I wonder why you married a woman at all?' I ask him presently.

He looks at me and smiles, and says at last :
' I married for the same reason that men have
married from the beginning of the world.'

' And what is that ? ' I ask stiffly.

' There is a legend that tells it better than
I can,' he answers.

' Then tell me the legend,' I say.

But he won't. He shakes his head. ' We
are not in the humour for legends,' he declares.

Later on I said to him : ' Men have always
taken advantage of women wherever they
could. Look at the marriage laws.'

' What is the matter with them ? ' he asks.

' How unjust they are to us.'

' Oh ! ' he answers, ' they are even worse
for us. All over the world, except in Burma,
marriage laws have been made by priests who
do not know anything about humanity. And
the principal supporters of priests are always
women. In Burma the laws are the outcome
of custom, and so though crude are reasonable
and just.'

' I never heard men complain of the marriage
laws before,' I say, astonished at his attitude.

' Possibly not. We don't make such a fuss
about it as you do. But the marriage laws of
civilised states are in many ways cruelly unjust
to men.'

' I never heard of such a thing before,' I
say. ' In what way ? '

' In a hundred ways. A wife may, for in-

stance, refuse to be a wife to a man and he has no redress. He can't separate or divorce her. If he seek elsewhere the necessity that she denies him, she can divorce him or separate from him, and, in any case, get the children all for herself.'

'Men don't care for children,' I say.

'Fathers are as fond of their children, and as necessary to their children as mothers,' he retorts, 'but the law doesn't see this.'

I know he is all wrong, but it is no good talking to him. Then he goes off to the bows and begins fishing over the side, catching horrible-looking creatures that I won't allow to be cooked for our meals. However, he is quite happy. He finds plenty to do. He talks to the dogs and to Po Chon and Po Ka, and takes little trips in the *Deebo* to try her new keel, and reads stodgy-looking law-books—and whistles. That shows how callous he is—he whistles. He doesn't care at all that marriage is a failure. No doubt he expected it would be.

And he hasn't been taken out of his old life as I have been out of mine. He has all his old resources. I have none except to write to friends, which I do every evening. Of course, I don't tell them what a failure marriage is, because I would never admit that to any one. A good wife covers up her husband's defects.

And I am doing my best to be a good wife

to him. I subordinate myself to him in everything. I will not obtrude myself but only obey. That is what men want. He wanted to land and see Pagan, for instance, but he didn't want to say so. He pretended that the only reason he had for going was if it would please me.

'Do you want to go to Pagan?' he asked.

I said I didn't mind. That made him furious, because he didn't want to say he wished to go. So I had to find an excuse for him. I said Po Chon wanted to stop.

When we came back, he wanted to buy me some lacquer-work—as a bribe, of course. Men think that women can be either bribed or browbeaten into surrendering their dearest opinions. But I wouldn't take it, because I don't want to cause him unnecessary expense. And he wasn't even grateful.

Oh dear, oh dear! I have to go to my bedroom every now and then to cry.

But I wouldn't let him know I cried for anything.

He would think he was winning.

He shan't.

The weather is changing too. This afternoon it began clouding up very fast and a cold wind is blowing. So I go into the salon. He stays outside, of course. He is happier away from me.

Never mind, I will work at his waistcoat,

returning good for evil. I only hope it *won't* burn him when he wears it.

How the rain pours. He ought to come in. But if I went to tell him he would say he wasn't a baby to be looked after like that. Or rather, he would not *say* it, only *think* it, which is worse. I am beginning to know men now. If I had known beforehand what men were like! Why aren't girls told? The lies of books. 'They lived happy ever afterwards.' Some day I will write a book.

There is a steamer coming up. I hear the paddles. It is very dark. I can hardly see to sew.

What is that awful shriek? And that ghastly light? I jump up, my heart beating like mad. It is the steamer's siren. And the light is her searchlight. She is close upon us. I am so terrified I cannot move. Where is he? What is he doing? Will he leave me to be drowned all alone?

Then I give a scream, for a hand has caught hold of my arm from behind. It is Po Chon. He looks frightened to death and pulls at me hard. 'La ba,' he growls. I know that means 'Come.'

Life suddenly comes back to my limbs, and I tear out after him the back way to where the *Deebo* is moored behind the bed-

room. We both jump in and he unties the rope in a great hurry. Then I become aware of the great black steamer coming out of the rain right on to us. Po Chon gives the boat a push which shoots it away. The steamer strikes the raft forward of the salon. I see the logs crumpling up. A great wave breaks over the raft and nearly capsizes us. There are shouts and screams. We are all going to be drowned, and where is he? Won't he even come and be drowned with me? I call out for him, but he does not answer. Then I grow giddy and faint and I fall down into the bottom of the boat.

First I feel something hurting me as I lie, then I feel very wet and cold, then I wonder where I am and I open my eyes.

I am half lying in the boat, in the bows is Po Chon, and there is nothing else but mist and water.

There is no raft, no steamer, no land, nothing at all but darkness and despair. My husband must be drowned and everybody else too, and I don't want to go on living any more.

There is nothing to do but cry.

CHAPTER XXI

‘New dawn is born out of the night alone.’
Greek Legend.

‘Mors janua vitæ.’

XXI



At the end of the raft there was confusion. The boatman had gone to the bows to row. Po Chon had disappeared; the cook was saying, 'Swamy, Swamy, Swamy!' and wringing his hands, and Ma Mie had caught hold of her husband and clung to him as to a life-belt. Waves surged over the raft and nearly washed them away. Then in a few minutes the end of the raft drifted free again, and went on down the river.

Po Ka put down his wife's arms from his neck and said soothingly: 'There, there, all danger is over now. See, the steamer has gone away.'

Ma Mie looked round at the mist and rain that enveloped them and at the steamer that had backed herself free at last and almost disappeared.

'Oh!' she said with a sob, 'I thought we should all be drowned.'

'No, no,' said Po Ka, 'everything is all right and quite safe now.'

‘But you aren’t going away?’ she asked.

‘Yes, I must go up and see what has happened to the front part of the raft and the Thakin and Po Chon,’ he answered.

‘Nothing has happened to them,’ she asserted, unwilling to let him go.

‘Well, I will go and see,’ he answered. ‘Go inside now and sit down till I come back.’

Very reluctantly she did as she was told, and Po Ka went forward. The kitchen was all right, twisted a little, but not damaged, and Po Ka went on to the bedroom joint. Neither was there much amiss here. The flooring had gone a little awry and the bedroom wall had acquired a slant, but nothing was damaged.

When he came to the salon joint, it was different. It had been nearly wrecked by the paddle-box. Some of the logs had gone, others were twisted this way and that, with big spaces between, and the salon itself was ruined. One wall had given way and the roof had fallen in. Beyond that there was nothing. The two forward joints had gone, leaving but a few ragged ends of ropes trailing in the water.

Po Ka looked, and his heart sank. Where were his brother, his master, his mistress? There was no sign of them at all. Even the cook, who was in the kitchen, had seen nothing of them.

‘They must be drowned,’ said the head raftsman, who had come up with him.

'No, no,' said Po Ka, shaking his head.

'Then where are they?' asked the raftsman.

'Perhaps they climbed on the steamer, perhaps they are drifting down the river on logs,' said Po Ka.

'They are drowned,' repeated the raftsman.

'They are not,' declared Po Ka angrily.

'Well, what are we to do?' asked the man.

Po Ka looked out at the dim grey river and the mist and rain. The steamer was gone. No doubt her captain thought the raft only an ordinary timber raft and that no one would be hurt, so he steamed on up the river. There was nothing now in sight.

'We must get to shore as soon as possible,' said Po Ka.

But that was not so easy. The steamer when entangled with the raft had dragged her out into the middle of the river. There was no bank in sight, and with only the stern oars available it would be hard to get her in.

They did their best, but the night had come before they had moored below a village on the farther bank.

Then Po Ka landed to tell the headman to send a messenger to the nearest police station. Thence it was telegraphed to Thayetmyo. Before ten all the station knew that Gallio and his wife were lost, were drowned perhaps already, or were drifting down the river no one knew where.

Yet till the morning nothing could be done. No help could be given. The Laughing Cavalier with two others went down to the steps where the launches lay and gazed across the water. It flowed down silently, holding its secret as it has held so many. In the dark night the waters seemed illimitable, an emblem of that life that comes we know not whence and passes always to the sea. It was a Laughing Cavalier no more, but a very sad and silent man who stood beside the river. Birth, marriage, and death, sorrow and pleasure, hope and fear, and peace and war, all yesterdays, to-day, and all to-morrows, they are one.

He turned to the others. 'At dawn, I will be off to look for them.'

'We also,' was the answer.

CHAPTER XXII

‘Faire nître un désir, le nourrir, le développer, le grandir,
l’irriter, le satisfaire, c’est un poème tout entier.’

BALZAC.

‘**D**EJABERS,’ says I to myself as I stopped at the gate and looked in, ‘it’s wrong we were to be anxious about you at all, at all. Just look at the spalpeens, then!’

And indade they seemed comfortable enough. There was a big tamarind-tree before the headman’s house, and under it was a chibutra of bamboo. And there, reclining quite at their ease on coloured rugs, were the Gallios we were all bemoaning as drowned. Both of them were dressed in Burmese clothes a little too small for them; both had bare feet and legs, and Mrs. Gallio’s hair was all down her back. But they didn’t seem to mind about that and were colloguing together as thick as thieves and laughing all the time. Two little naked Burmese children were regarding them with awe and admiration from a distance, and in a corner of the compound I could see Po Chon busy in an improvised kitchen. The clear morning sunshine broke and flickered through the leaves overhead and

a great purple creeper made a background like a royal curtain.

‘And there’s a hundred miles of river searching for you and bewailing you,’ thinks I to myself. But we did ought to have known better about Gallio at all events.

Just then Mrs. Gallio got up and, putting her feet into a pair of Burmese sandals, started limping off to Po Chon’s kitchen, and I walked in.

‘Hallo,’ says I to Gallio.

‘Hallo,’ says he, staring at me. ‘I’m blessed if it isn’t Franz again. Look here, Franz. Can’t a fellow get shipwrecked anywhere without you turning up immediately after?’ And he laughed. ‘Not but what I’m glad to see you, old fellow,’ he continued, making room on the chibutra. ‘Come and sit down and for humanity’s sake give me a decent cigar. It’s nearly dead I am, smoking these white Burmese cigars and trying to get a taste out of them.’

‘Gallio,’ says I reprovingly, ‘d’ you know that thousands of square miles of country are deploring your loss and looking for you?’

‘No,’ says he, lighting the cigar; ‘how did all thesesquare miles know anything about me?’

‘Why,’ says I, ‘when Po Ka got ashore after dark he sent news to the nearest police station, and they telegraphed far and wide that you and Mrs. Gallio and Po Chon were drowned. The news reached me at Thayetmyo about

ten o'clock, and at dawn three launches started to find you.'

'Are you one?' he asks. 'How did you know we were here?'

'I am,' says I. 'As I came along I saw the *Deebo* rocking there below, so I landed to inquire. What do you mean by it, anyhow? And how did you get here? Why aren't you drowned?'

'I don't know,' says he. 'I just went drifting down on a log till the rain cleared off and I could see. Then I got ashore at a village below here. Early this morning they brought me news that the raft was all right on the other bank and that my wife and Po Chon had landed here out of a boat, so I came up and found them. Looks nice in Burmese kit, don't she, Franz?'

Well, and she did. She seemed just like a schoolgirl with her hair down like that. 'What's she doing there?' I asked.

'Oh, I forgot,' says he. 'She's cooking breakfast and you'll have to help to eat it, Franz. Lucky you came, eh?'

Then Mrs. Gallio left her kitchen and came towards us. When she saw me she stopped and looked confused.

'Come along, Lesbia,' said Gallio. 'It's only Franz Hals, you know. He's accustomed to your fancy dress'; and Mrs. Gallio pulled herself together and came up. 'It's becoming

a habit of Franz to find people who have been shipwrecked,' says he. 'You should be careful, or it may grow on you,' says he to me.

'I hope,' says Mrs. Gallio, 'that you will let it grow on you, Mr. Hals, and that whenever we are shipwrecked you will always find us.'

'Anyhow, it's not such a bad habit as getting shipwrecked,' says I. 'You won't keep on doing it, will you?'

But Gallio only laughed. 'That's as may be,' says he. 'It isn't a bad habit at all. It's a very good habit. I am very glad I was shipwrecked, aren't you, Lesbia?'

And to my surprise she looks at him and laughs and blushes and nods. Faith, and I stared at her, then I looked at her, then I looked away. For I think that she had tears in her blue eyes—and Gallio also. I wondered what it meant.

Then Gallio says: 'What time's breakfast, Lesbia? Franz says he's hungry.'

'Oh,' she says, and looks at me, 'are you *wanting* breakfast?'

'Of course he is,' says Gallio. 'Hunger and thirst are chronic with Franz. You would not grudge him food.'

'No-o,' she says, 'but there isn't much for breakfast, Mr. Hals, only what we could get in the village, and no proper pans or anything to cook with, and no proper cook.'

‘That ’s herself,’ laughs Gallio. ‘She is the improper cook.’

‘It doesn’t matter for me if it isn’t very good, because I don’t eat much,’ she continues, ‘nor yet for him, because he’s bound by law and custom to eat what his wife cooks, and like it too, but you!’

‘Yes, you’re a free man,’ says Gallio.

‘I’m not going away,’ I says. ‘It’ll be a grand breakfast for sure, and I won’t want law or custom to make me like it. I’ve only got cold bully-beef in the launch and—do you remember it on the frontier, Gallio?’

‘Lord!’ says he, turning up his nose, ‘we lived on it for months.’

‘Very well,’ says she resignedly, ‘you are warned, and as it’s ready I’ll tell Po Chon.’

So she calls to Po Chon, and presently he brings it on two red-lacquered trays, and a jolly good breakfast it was, though how she and Po Chon cooked it beats me. There was river-fish roasted on sticks, a baked partridge and a great heap of white rice with egg curry in a bowl. We ate it all with our fingers because we had no forks or spoons and only one knife, but that difficulty didn’t stop us. We finished everything there was.

‘A better breakfast,’ says I, washing my fingers in a bowl Po Chon brought along, ‘I never ate.’

‘Honest Injun?’ she asks, looking at me.

‘On the faith of an Irishman,’ says I. ‘It tasted fine.’

‘And you’ll promise that it won’t make you ill,’ says she anxiously, ‘eating so much just to please me.’

‘Ill?’ says I, while Gallio roars with laughter. ‘Ill? I never was ill in all my life.’

‘Well, then,’ says she, ‘we’ll just have an hour’s rest before we go down to the launch and you take us back to civilisation, and my husband shall tell us a fairy tale.’

‘Franz won’t care for fairy tales,’ says Gallio.

‘Oh yes, he will,’ says she, ‘your kind of fairy tale. D’you know,’ says she to me, ‘that my husband says that all the real legends and myths and fairy tales are true.’

‘Indade,’ says I, ‘and how does he make that out?’

‘He says they are allegories of life,’ says she, ‘made by great seers before the world’s eyes were blinded. He says they are true, as true now as when they were composed; that all the tales of Zeus and the other gods are true.’

‘Indade,’ says I. ‘Well, maybe he’s right. Those old Greeks were no fools, Mrs. Gallio, and they did not talk without a reason. Has he found the reason?’

‘He says he has,’ says she. ‘He’s told me many, and all of them are true, as I can see when he explains them. Whenever we

get to a difficulty, he tells me that people thousands of years ago found the same trouble and also found the answer. Then he tells me a tale, and I see it's true.'

'Go on,' says I.

'Which do you want?' asks he.

'You know,' she answers, and she looks at him. 'You know. Yesterday, upon the raft——' and she stops and smiles at him.

'Oh, that?' say she.

'Yes, that.'

'Very well,' says he. 'Here goes.'

'Once upon a time there was a marriage-feast up there in Olympus, where the gods live, and all the gods and goddesses were there but one.'

'Which was that?' asks she.

'Discord,' says he. 'They didn't want her at the feast, so they didn't invite her. She was angry, naturally, and determined on revenge, so when they were all enjoying themselves at table she came suddenly in and threw a golden apple on to the board and fled. The gods picked up the apple and found it was inscribed, 'For the most fair,' so the goddesses Hera and Pallas and Aphrodite each claimed it. Zeus would not decide between them, but referred them to Paris, the herdsman of Mount Ida, who would judge.'

'Who was Paris and why to him?' she asked.

'Paris is Franz, and me, and every man

that ever lived, or will live,' answered Gallio, 'and it is for him to decide what is fairest in his eyes.'

'Aha,' thinks I to myself, 'that's news to me that I am Paris,' and I listens more carefully.

'The goddesses came to Paris one by one. "Give me the apple," Hera commanded, "for I am Power and Wealth, which shall be yours," but Paris held his hand.

"Give me the apple," Pallas said, "for I am Wisdom, and you shall be wise."

"Give me the apple," Aphrodite whispered, "for I am Love, and I will give you Love."

Gallio stopped and laughed.

'Go on,' says Mrs. Gallio, 'which did he choose?'

'Paris,' said Gallio to me, 'what did we do? Which did we choose? Which will we always choose? Do we want as our wives' dowries wealth and power, do we want wisdom, or do we choose love?' He laughed, and Mrs. Gallio looked at me.

'In faith,' says I, 'Aphrodite's my girl. Wealth and power and wisdom we can win ourselves or do without, but only a wife can give us love.'

'You hear what Paris says,' and Gallio looked at her.

She thought I didn't see, but I saw well enough that she put her hand on his and pressed it. I pretended to be looking at the

two little naked Cupids who were always gazing at Mrs. Gallio.

‘Besides,’ said Gallio in a reflective tone, ‘if you choose Aphrodite, the others may be added to you.’

‘That’s a new gloss,’ says I, ‘and I’m sure my old dominie would never have admitted it.’

‘Maybe,’ says Gallio, ‘but it’s true.’

‘It’s also true,’ said I, ‘that there was discord when Paris chose Love—Pallas thought he ought to have chosen her. Faith, and there’s trouble still about that same.’ But the Gallios only looked at each other and laughed.

So we talked a little more, and then we went down to my launch.

What a change, thinks I, has come over these since I met them first a fortnight or so ago. Then they were two still, each ever conscious of each other, talking at each other, showing off, studying the other, rivals in a way. Now it was different. They had accepted each other for better and for worse, had become one, not two. They were still conscious of each other, but only as the right hand is of the left, as the eyes are of the mouth, complementary parts in one whole.

I wonder, was it the shipwreck that did this? Then should all married couples be shipwrecked—and some drowned. Gallio has luck even in his accidents.

I took them up to their raft, and found it moored against the bank with nothing lost. But it was much shattered. The front two joints were gone, and the salon was broken. They looked at it in dismay.

'We can never mend it,' Gallio said, 'and after all it's done its work. What do you say, my dear? we'll take the steamer now.'

'We couldn't begin again,' she said. 'We've had our voyage.'

'And learnt the river?'

She laughed. 'And learnt the river. It nearly drowned us——'

'And are you sorry?'

She shook her head and smiled.

So I took them to the station, and next day they left us.

'Good-bye,' they said. 'Good-bye.'

'Come home and see us,' Gallio said.

'Come home and marry,' said Mrs. Gallio.

'He shan't,' said Gallio. 'He shall be the Laughing Cavalier still. Marriage is a serious matter.'

'What then?' she asked.

'Though *we* be virtuous shall there be no more cakes and ale? Yet such do not become the married man. Good-bye.'

The steamer moved away, and I waved my hand to them. Faith, I was sorry they were gone. But marriage is too serious for me. I mind me there is a legend about that too.

CHAPTER XXIII

‘That marriage only lives which is instinct with love.
The marriage of such as lack love is but a rotten carcass
covered with skin.’

Kural.

XXIII



WE are on the steamer passing to the sea. We stand quite close together leaning upon the rail and watching the low banks go swiftly by. It is our river still, and this is near the end of its life journey. How far has it not come since first we saw it emerging from the hills where it was born, two streams to be one river. What has it not done and learnt since then?

Its waters are very muddy now, thick with dense silt that it has picked up on its way and brought down to its ending. It has done its work, and it is stained and tired. Had it kept itself as clear as when it started, it had not done its work. What matter the stains? It passes to the sea, there to forget itself and merge in the great ocean. Before it leaves the land for the great deeps it will drop all its silt and become part of the clear blue tides that ebb and flow throughout the world. And it does not hesitate, it does not fear. It runs as swiftly as above.

And we, what have we learned since that morning when our streams were joined up in the hills? We have learned what marriage is not, and what marriage is. Marriage is not a ceremony made by Church nor State; it lies in no empty words, it is no tie, no matrimonial chain. It is a living, growing, changing state wherein two opposites are blended into one.

There are two loves in marriage. The first is of the flesh; it is that call of nature desiring intelligent children for her future which shows the combination that will give her such. This love is in our instinct, it is despite ourselves. She knows, she calls, we can obey or can deny; we can't create nor change nor stifle. It comes to us unbidden, it is the cry of flint to steel.

It is the base on which alone the other love can grow. For it creates in the beginning close companionship, which is a necessity for the germination of the other. It creates pleasure in one another, it awakens and stimulates the emotions which feed the other love.

The second love is of the spirit, its name is understanding. Out of the first conflict of two opposites there grows a mutual respect and knowledge. Each learns that the other is complementary and therefore necessary. Neither seeks to convince the other, to impose his views upon the other's sight. Two

eyes are necessary. Did one eye renounce its function then were all perspective lost. Each has a point of view quite different from the other, and each is true. Were either to renounce his sex, then were all balance gone. And if the salt have lost its savour wherewith can it be salted? A man who sees as a woman sees, a woman who sees as a man, what are they fit for? Not for love. We love each other because we are man and woman.

‘ Man gives and Woman takes,
Man makes and Woman saves,
Man sees large and Woman small,
Man makes the world, Woman the home,
Man is the poet, Woman the audience,
Man would sacrifice his home for the world's sake,
Woman would sacrifice the world for her home's sake,
Man joins but Woman separates.’

And many other antagonisms we have learned, yet we fight no more, for we have learned that each is necessary to the other. We are not enemies but friends; the closer that we complement each other, and the truer each is to his own sex, the better is each to the other.

We have learned this, that for either to renounce his sex would be ruin to both, for Man and Woman are not two, but one, and what hurts either hurts both.

So out of mutual difference grows our love.

Every day we learn more of each other by effort that never ceases. Marriage is a

perpetual struggle to keep the balance true, to understand, for tout comprendre c'est tout pardonner. It grows for ever, for what does not grow is dead, and dead things putrefy. And we have made a promise to each other and ourselves.

If ever true marriage should cease, if ever we should find that we are drifting apart, not growing together, we will be honest and confess it. We will not make a mockery of this sacred thing. If, despite all our efforts, all our spiritual love should die, then we will recognise this truth. Marriage will have ceased for us, and we care not for mockeries and chains.

We take this promise in all sincerity and truth, and laugh. For our marriage shall not cease. We will not leave our happiness to chance nor custom, but we will work by every thought and act to keep it true. Those who wish for peace prepare for war. Only by keeping always strong and true and brave can you ward off war and the disaster that it brings. It is the same in marriage; only by realising that disaster is bound to come unless we daily strive to keep it off can it be avoided.

'The chains of matrimony'—that is a Church phrase.

So we pass on.

The banks have almost vanished now. Our river merges fast into the sea. Its waters now are less and less muddy, and they toss already with the freedom of the sea.

Our river passes. So our lives will pass sometime into that sea from whence we came, to which we all return again. All rivers run into the sea, yet is not the sea full ; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

And so is life, for ever, ever, evermore.

S R L F

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